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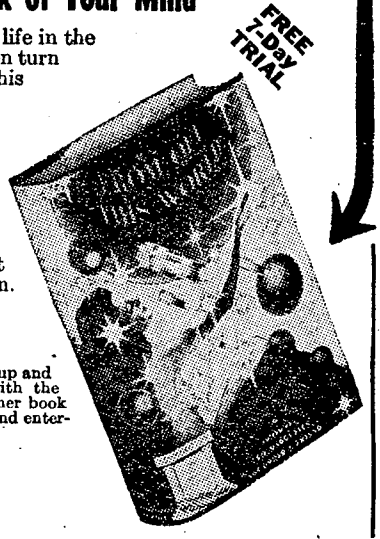

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Front cover painting by Robert Gibson Jones, illustrating a scene from "The Shades Of Toffee."

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The Editor's Notebook

A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

AS THIS editorial goes to press we note with considerable interest the wealth of activity in the science fiction field as a whole. We understand that Hollywood is about to release a new stf film entitled, DESTINATION MOON, taken from a novel by Robert A. Heinlein who has had quite a few science fiction stories in the *Saturday Evening Post* during the past year. We await the film's debut here in Chicago, hoping that Hollywood will have done justice to the theme of the film.

AT LEAST a half-dozen new novels have crossed our desk from various book publishers also during this past month. We regret that the great majority of them are still reprints and along these lines reaffirm our contention of a few issues ago that reprint practices in the stf book field are more of a danger than an asset to the genre.

AND WE also took a look at the newsstands the other day. We were somewhat surprised to see a veritable avalanche of new stf magazines being displayed. Some of the titles are brand new. Others are reissues of magazines that fell by the wayside in years past. As we have stated, we were somewhat surprised to see so many in such a short space of time. And yet we were also pleased. For it is a healthy sign. It is one furthering proof that the country is becoming science-fiction-conscious. But all in all, your two favorite stf magazines, AMAZING STORIES and FANTASTIC ADVENTURES, still stand out with the attractiveness of their covers, the quality of their stories and, as your rave letters have indicated, their size. We're proud of our two magazines, and will continue to present them to you as "the leaders in the field".

WE'VE BEEN in close contact with some of the top writers in the field, putting them to work on feature cover stories for coming issues. We just finished talking to Fritz Leiber, who has turned in what we believe to be one of the great fantasy novels of this or any other year. The title is, YOU'RE ALL ALONE, and we were so impressed with it that we scheduled it for the next issue of FA. Fritz tells us that even now he is negotiating for book publication on the novel. But you'll read it in FA first!

WE JUST opened a letter from L. Ron Hubbard, which contained the rather pleasant news that within a few weeks we'll have his new novel on our desk. The really interesting item in relation to this news is the fact that the new novel is a sequel to Hubbard's now famous SLAVES OF SLEEP which has been recently published in book form. The title of the new novel is THE MASTERS OF SLEEP, and we're anxiously awaiting a chance to read it...

LESTER DEL REY called us from New York the other day and apologized for the long delay in delivering his new manuscript. He said he would finish it within a week or ten days at the longest. When it reaches us, we'll schedule it for an early issue, and of course, it will be a cover story. ...Perhaps you're wondering if we buy our stories sight unseen. The truth is that on the stories we mention, we've had a hand in the formulating of the plot along with the author, so we know beforehand what the story will concern. As to the writing, well, authors like del Rey, Hubbard, Leiber, Williamson, and deCamp have achieved their position in the top rank of science-fantasy writers because of the excellence of their individual styles. Who could ask for more?

WE'D ALSO like to make mention here this month of the feature novel by Charles Myers in this issue. As you all know, Charlie Myers is our own favorite discovery, and through the past few years his "Toffee" stories have become an integral part of your reading enjoyment. With THE SHADES OF TOFFEE, Myers has finally put his unique creation into a novel length. We feel a little bit proud in presenting it to you, for you will be able to recognize the full talent Myers' style embodies. We've said before that we feel he is the one writer capable of donning the mantle of the late master Thorne Smith. We think that this first novel length story substantiates that view.

WE'D LIKE to close up shop for this month with a sincere thought. Since one of the great problems to be conquered in making space flight possible is that of suitable and sufficient fuel, why don't the scientists of the world turn their efforts with atomic research in the realm of the hydrogen atom to one of fuel instead of bombs? Bombs only destroy, while atomic fuel will open a new and infinitely vast frontier for all men.....WLH

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The SHADES of TOFFEE

By
Charles F. Myers

His mouth formed a soundless whistle as he looked up to see the scantily clad Toffee smiling down at him.

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Marc Pillsworth thought that certain laws were futile and should be repealed – such as gravity – which he annihilated! . . .

STANDING in the center of the basement laboratory, Marc Pillsworth held the vial up to the light and carefully poured out a small portion of the liquid so that the measure would be exact to the final degree.

Certainly, if he had known that the thing he measured was destruction, intrigue and madness, he would have hurled the container and its greenish contents to the floor. But he did not know, or even dream . . .

Assured that the amount was correct beyond question, he turned with the vial, poised it over the small vat on the work table, and poured.

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Chaos!

The room screamed with brilliant light as the vat erupted and vengefully spat its contents to the four walls. The wall at the end of the room shuddered and shrugged away a great, irregular section of concrete so that the night gushed inside and swallowed up the light. Caught in the tide of the rushing darkness, Marc felt himself lifted helplessly from his feet, hurled upward to a great height, then plunged downward headfirst.

He fell endlessly, it seemed, down and down. And the darkness droned in his ears and in the pit of his stomach as he fell—deeper and deeper into a region of black strangeness. Fear grew inside him, writhing, coiling and recoiling like a great venomous snake in the depths of his stomach. He opened his mouth to scream, but the sound died in his throat as the darkness rushed inside him and caused the metallic taste of panic.

And then it was over.

He had arrived, but how and where and for what precise reason he couldn't imagine. But, oddly, it didn't seem to matter. There was no reason for it to matter now. None that he could think of at the moment. His thoughts moved so slowly, it seemed.

It was as though he had lain down to rest, limply and gently, in a soft coolness. A languor seeped through him, and he fell easily under the spell of a dreamy quietude. What could any man conceivably have to worry about when he felt like this?

Marc stretched his arms up over his head, then brought them down and clasped his hands at the back of his neck. He was suddenly swept with a mood of utmost felicity. Everything was so unreasonably wonderful! Mother, he thought, pin a rose on me! He grinned happily at his own urbanity.

And then the darkness began to pulse with a faint light which grew steadily stronger with each successive impulse. Slowly, vague outlines began to rise out of the dimness and form a horizon. And then the light became a steady glow, and the forms moved in closer and were distinct. Marc sat up and looked about him with astonished eyes.

A SOFT emerald greenness stretched beneath him in all directions, lifting softly from rise to rise in the distance, gently sloping into cool shadows. Behind him a knoll rose above the others, and along its side stretched a grove of tall feathery trees which were graceful beyond description. A soft breeze coiled through the trees trailing a shimmering blue mist, like a scarf, capriciously upward and out of sight beyond the rise.

Everywhere was a muted beauty that did not trade in harsh contrasts. Strangely, Marc could not bring himself to wonder at his being here in this impossible region; it was enough that he simply *was* here. He lay back again and gazed into the sky, noting without surprise that the clear blueness was unmarked by any brash and orthodox ball of sun.

His mind wandered free, along heretofore untrodden paths of melody, color and form. Had there ever been a time for making worrisome decisions, for seeking the multi-sided answer to the human equation? It didn't seem likely. This is Eternity, Marc thought, Eternity is like this. Throwing his arms free, he stretched his lean length to its utmost.

Eternity ended abruptly.

"Well, I'll be damned!" a voice said distinctly. "I'll be damned and broiled over a slow flame!"

Marc swung up into a sitting posi-

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tion, and his eyes raked the scene behind him. He froze.

Even in that first moment of confused surprise, Marc was quite well aware that no girl had ever eyed him with such undisguised pleasure—or such frank intent. Certainly no girl as beautiful as this one, at any rate. Perhaps, if she'd just done something about getting dressed... He'd never seen a more top notch pair of legs.

Disconcertingly, the girl had chosen to place between herself and the raw elements only a slight green tunic of a consistency comparable to that of the airy mists on the slope. Considering this, Marc felt keenly that the situation called for, in full voice, a hasty apology and the quick slam of a door; he was terribly aware that there wasn't much more between him and this alarming newcomer than the atmosphere and a very pregnant silence. He couldn't understand how the girl could be so unconcerned about it.

"I'm sorry...!" Marc said quickly. "I..."

"I'm delighted," the girl said. She smiled softly, in a way that suggested great intimacy.

"I think I'll scream," Marc said weakly, "if you're not going to."

"I'm not going to," the girl said. "Not a chance."

Marc reflected erratically that this creature, in spite of her loveliness, was surely a traveler from hell; the fires of that region danced unmistakably on the surface of her soft red hair and in the depths of her vivid green eyes. His unbelieving gaze left her pert young face and helplessly traveled the course of her supple body. It was a disturbing trip; unhurried curves moved indolently outward and took their time about coming back. And then, as the girl started forward, Marc glanced up to discover that her gaze had followed his own. He looked away sharply and was aware of a feverish sensation about the neck and cheeks.

"There's no need to blush," the girl laughed.

"There's every need in the world," Marc said uneasily. "A crying need."

"If you're embarrassed," the girl said, "you've no one to blame but yourself."

Marc turned back, careful that his gaze went directly to her face and remained there. "Are you trying to suggest that it's my fault that you're naked?"

"Of course it is," the girl said. "It's all your fault, now that you bring it up. After all, I'm your exclusive creation. You dreamed me up, curve for curve, line for line, and if the job seems a little immoderate, you should have thought of that sooner." She moved lightly to where he was sitting and lowered herself to the ground beside him. She crossed one slender leg over the other in the manner of a gem broker displaying a stock of crown emeralds on a length of black velvet. "Not that I'm complaining, you understand. Personally, especially after your bug-eyed reaction, I regard myself as a pretty piece of merchandise."

MARC FLINCHED slightly at the directness of this self-appraisal, but found it hard to find a point of disagreement. Though the girl's nearness had done much to impair his mental processes, he was all too aware of the merchandise at hand and an unspoken invitation to feel the superior quality of the goods. He breathed deeply and edged away.

"What do you mean, I dreamed you up?" he asked.

The girl sighed despairingly. "I had hoped," she murmured, "that we wouldn't have to waste time on any-

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thing so dull as pedigrees. However, I can see that you're the fretful type." She shrugged. "I'm Toffee." She leaned back and gazed at Marc from the corner of her eye with an expression that plainly indicated that she had revealed "all."

Marc tried to think. He repeated the name several times to himself. Toffee... Toffee... Toffee... It didn't mean a thing to him...

"Well?" the girl said.

"Well?" Marc echoed faintly. The look in her eyes made him warmly uncomfortable.

"If you're going to start making passes at me," the girl said, propping herself up on one elbow, "I think I ought to say right now that there will be the usual hollow pretense of resistance." She smiled slowly. "But my heart won't be half in it, and that's a fact." She reached down and smoothed the tunic over the curve of her perfectly formed hip. "I just thought I'd mention it."

"Oh, my gosh!" Marc gasped. "Do I understand you correctly?"

"If you don't," the girl said with a twinge of impatience, "I might as well pick up my drawing pencils and go home. Why are we wasting all this time and energy?"

"Don't you have any repressions at all?" Marc asked.

"Of course not," the girl answered. "That's the way you made me."

"The way I made you?"

The girl nodded and leaned toward him. "I told you, I'm Toffee." She studied his face for a moment, then sat up. "Say, don't you recognize me?"

"I've never set eyes on you before in my life," Marc said emphatically. "Maybe that's because I don't habitually frequent burlesque theatres."

"Now, look here, you withered old goat!" A flame of annoyance flickered brightly in the green eyes. "Just where do you get off, making cracks like that? I've been in the back of your mind for years. You've dreamed me up, hip, thigh and shoulder, just the way I am. Don't think you're going to get away with pretending you're above it all now."

Realization blanked Marc's expression. "You mean you're a product of my subconscious mind?"

"Now you're getting it," the girl said. She swept a hand at the slopes behind them. "This is the valley of your mind. I've been languishing in this trap for years. If I've grown a little eager in the meantime, it's only natural. It puts an awful strain on a girl to have what I've got with no market for outlet. I'm just a bundle of frozen assets."

MARC SMILED, and his manner became a bit less constrained. "Then all this is only a dream, and you're strictly an imaginary figure."

"You could put it that way," the girl nodded. However, there was a note of reservation in her voice. "Of course, it works two ways really. You might say that you're only in my imagination too. Up till now, that is." She surveyed his sprawled length with critical interest. "And, believe me, you're getting all the best of the bargain. If I'm a dream come true, you're a moaning nightmare. I'll bet you're nothing but a mess of knobs and angles under those baggy clothes of yours."

"We'll just skip my knobs and angles," Marc said distantly, "if you don't mind."

"I do mind," the girl said, looking a trifle alarmed. "I mind like all get-out. Why should I want to skip the awful things? Do you mean I'm to

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pick them up all in a string and play jump rope with them?" She shuddered delicately. "Is that what you have in mind?"

"Of course not," Marc said. "I merely mean to say that my knobs and angles do not constitute a matter for your concern in the least. I'll be more than happy if you'll just ignore my knobs and angles altogether. Just pretend they aren't there."

"What an awful picture that brings to mind," the girl said. "Without your knobs and angles you'd be even worse than you are already. Besides, they're of utmost concern to me. Heaven knows they're nothing to boast about, or even mention, for that matter, but they're the only ones handy, and I've been waiting for years to get my hands on a working set of knobs and. . ."

"That's enough," Marc broke in. "I wish you'd stop going on about your sordid-minded desires. I don't want to hear about them. And get away from me!" He started violently. "Leave my knobs and angles alone!"

But it was too late to protest. Already the girl had twined her arms tightly about his neck and was drawing him toward her.

"This," she whispered with soft intensity, "is an angle of my own."

Marc struggled for a moment under the knowing pressure of her lips, but the period of resistance was short lived. He yielded quickly to the coolness of her arms about his neck and the warm brush of her hair against his cheek. He had actually begun to aid and abet the effort before it was over. Toffee released him and leaned back.

"That," she said, "is the introductory offer, merely a sample to bring the product to your attention. The objective, in case you're somewhat hazy, is to create a large and steady demand for the brand."

Marc was more than hazy. "Oh, my gosh!" he breathed. "I feel completely demoralized!"

"Fine," Toffee said blandly. "It takes a heap of demoralizing to make a man a man. We're on the right track and proceeding with a steady speed. We'll build up steam as we go along."

"Oh, no we won't!" Marc said getting uncertainly to his feet. "We won't build up anything, you and I. We'll put an end to this dream before we both have something to regret. If I dreamed you up, I can get rid of you too."

INSTANTLY the girl was on her feet beside him. "Of all the gall!" she said. "Of all the slithering, dripping gall!"

Marc winced. "You're affecting my stomach," he said.

"And that's not all I'm going to affect before I'm through with you! I'm going to affect you from end to end and border to border! You leave me stumping it around in this air tunnel head of yours all these years, and then dream me up just to throw me over!"

"Wait a second. . .!"

"Be quiet," Toffee snapped. "Wait till I'm through. This goes on for some time." She gazed tragically into the distance and resumed in a mellowed tone: "That's all I ever was to you, a plaything to be used and cast aside when you've grown tired of me." Her voice broke with emotion. "Now that I'm old and ugly, you're ashamed of me.... This is even better with violins."

"Stop that," Marc said. "Don't be ridiculous. There's no need for dramatics. You're far from old and ugly,

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and as for..."

But suddenly the girl had fastened herself to him for the second time. "Then you really do think I'm a little sensational after all?" she cried ecstatically. "Kiss me! I'm yours!"

"No!" Marc cried. "I didn't say that! I didn't even mention...!"

"Yes, you did," the girl breathed in his ear, and drew her mouth quickly to his.

"Wait a minute!" Marc objected, forcing her from him. "This sort of thing has got to stop!"

"Why, for heaven's sake? I think it's perfectly divine."

Marc stopped to consider her question. Actually, why did it have to stop? There was a reason, a good reason, if only he could think of it. And then something stirred in the far reaches of his mind and drifted slowly forward.

Julie!

"Holy smoke!" Marc cried. "Julie. I have a wife!"

"Of course," the girl said. "But what difference does that make? I don't mind in the least. I'm terribly broad-minded. Besides, it happens that your wife isn't in this dream. Why drag her into it and spoil everything?"

"No!" Marc said excitedly. "No. You don't understand. I just remembered. There was an explosion. Julie was in the house—and a lot of her friends. Heaven only knows what happened. Oh, my gosh!" He drew away from the girl and glanced desperately around. "I've got to get out of here!"

But even as he spoke another matter rose for his immediate attention. All of a sudden the little valley had been seized with a shuddering convulsion. The greenness underfoot began to tremble violently. As Marc looked frightenedly about, the trees on the knoll commenced a weird seesawing, weaving back and forth in mad counter rhythm. Then, with a great roar of agony, the quiet valley began to crumble apart beneath their very feet. Everything dropped away into blackness...

Falling, Marc was only incidentally aware of the tightening pressure of the girl's arms about his neck. And then the frightened words came breathlessly, close to his ear: "Marc! Marc! Don't leave!"

"PLEASE, Marc! Open your eyes!" The imperative note of command sang hollowly in the depths of his subconscious, echoed back in some small chamber of his awareness. He stirred.

"Open your eyes, darling. Look at me."

Marc clawed at the edge of darkness, caught hold, and pulled himself upward toward the lighter region of consciousness. He struggled to the brink, caught a measure of leverage, and opened his eyes...

Julie's face peered down at him duskily, her blue eyes bright with fear even in the dim moonlight. A whisp of blonde hair had gone astray across her forehead.

"Marc!" she cried. "Marc!"

Marc tried his reflexes and sat up. "Julie," he murmured. "What happened?"

"Never mind, dear," Julie said. "Are you all right?"

Marc considered the matter of his all-rightness. He let his enfeebled concentration travel the circuit of his body. There were no sharp pains or ominous numbnesses.

"I think so," he said. "I think I'm all right. I had a dream..."

"Here," Julie said, with a sigh of relief. "Let me help you up." On his

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feet, Marc tested the working parts of his rangey anatomy and found them all in an operative condition. He glanced around and for the first time since his awakening realized that he was still in the basement laboratory. In the dim moonlight that filtered through the hole in the wall, it was evident that the place had been ruined. The upper end, however, leading away into the wine bins had apparently been spared. The explosion rose and happened again in his memory.

"Well," he sighed, turning to Julie, "it turned out a real bust, didn't it?"

Julie gazed at him for a long moment and suffered a nasty transformation. Her eyes no longer reflected concern, solicitude or even slight affection. To the contrary, they expressed extreme annoyance. Evidently, now that she was certain he was all right, she was prepared to blame him for all the foul acts of man since the first dawn of time.

"Just what went on down here?" she inquired with tense hostility. "Do you realize, Marconi, that you nearly blew the Daughters of the Golden Gardenia right out the front door?"

Marc's thoughts turned to a picture of the Daughters of the Golden Gardenia being blown out his front door, and he experienced a sudden glow of inner warmth.

"And what were the old hens banded together on the same roost for this time?" he asked acidly. "Getting up funds to lay linoleum in the huts of African bushwhackers?"

Julie's blue eyes grew wide with surprise. That Marc had any feeling except awe for her club ladies had not occurred to her. "Marc Pillsworth!" she exclaimed. "The coffee urn upset on Mrs. Beemer and ruined her dress!"

"The old trull's figure did more to ruin that dress than any dozen coffee urns ever could," Marc said levely. "As a matter of fact, I'm enormously pleased it happened. It's my fondest dream come true. I've been longing to hit Mrs. Beemer with a coffee urn ever since I first set eyes on her. Right now I'm going upstairs to bed and I don't want to hear any more about it. My head hurts."

For a moment Julie stood still before him, transfixed with astonishment. Then suddenly, drawing her hand tremblingly to her mouth, she made a small whimpering sound, turned, and fled up the steps.

Marc remained where he was, listening to her hurried footsteps as they sounded through the upper hallway, and on the stairs leading to the second floor. There was a moment of silence, then the slam of a door. Marc shrugged.

He glanced at the ruins. The floor was littered heavily with rubble. None of the equipment had survived, that was obvious even in the dark. Well, he'd have to start all over again. He turned and started toward the steps. Then he stopped short and glanced sharply in the direction of the wine bins.

He could have sworn he'd caught a flash of movement there from the corner of his eye. He waited, peering into the darkness, but there was nothing. He smiled wryly and turned back again to the steps.

"Just nerves," he murmured to himself. And then his thoughts reverted momentarily to the Daughters of the Golden Gardenia. "Wish I'd blown the old dragons out the front door and into the gates of Hell," he said.

With that warm thought he drew a deep breath and started up the stairs. Curiously, the explosion had

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left him with a great sense of exhilaration...

CHAPTER II

MARC awoke.

A drift of silver moonlight spilled through the window to the carpet and across the foot of the bed. Marc lay still and let his thoughts shift effortlessly with the warm breeze that riffled the curtains. He was curiously alert to the night, its mood and quality. There was a strange clarity here, and he had a feeling he'd been awakened to it for a definite purpose, though he couldn't imagine at the moment what that purpose might be. He listened for a sound from Julie's room across the hall, but there was none.

He pondered his exuberance at having spoken harshly to Julie after the accident. After all, he didn't really want to hurt her. They did love each other, he and Julie, and that was the plain fact of the matter. But now that he thought of it, perhaps that was just the trouble; perhaps the fact was so terribly plain that it wasn't even of interest any more.

Certainly, it had never occurred to Marc to be jealous of Julie. Never once had he been distressed at the thought that she might be flirting a hip at the stable boy while he was away at his office in town. Indeed, if the idea had occurred to him at all, he'd have laughed at it. It was true that there was a certain amount of comfort in this, but not one iota of excitement.

Most depressing, though, was the thought that Julie, in her turn, was not jealous of him. It didn't seem to distress her in the least that, as owner and head of one of the most successful advertising agencies in the nation, he was daily in close contact with the most deadly and devastating models in the business.

Of course Julie had every reason to take confidence in her own cool blonde beauty, but on the other hand there was the thoroughly distressing thought that perhaps she felt Marc could be trusted with these gilt-edged females simply because they could be trusted with him. No man likes to feel that his wife is sure of him not because of his own sterling qualities, but because no other woman could conceivably be so desperate as to find him attractive. Julie's bland confidence in his fidelity, Marc felt, tended to make things terribly dull in the neighborhood of the parlor, bedroom and bath.

Marc looked to himself for the cause of his unhappy state of affairs. The decision was neither for nor against. Perhaps he wasn't handsome, but then he wasn't hideous either. His face actually had a rather nice angular plainness about it, and his grey eyes were undeniably kind and could, on occasion, be extremely humorous.

He was a bit too thin for so tall a man, but there was a suggestion, at thirty-three, of a litheness and youth about his figure that was not unattractive. His sandy hair at least had the virtue of unobtrusiveness without any such vulgar ostentations as polished slickness or gleaming ringlets. On careful and unprejudiced analysis, Marc felt that as an example of his sex he was neither such a one as to send a woman wilting to the carpet with palpitations or screaming to the medicine chest for the salts. The clue to the rising becalmment of his marriage, then, had to lie in another quarter. But Marc was at a loss to determine its direction. What he did not realize was that, from the outset, he had allowed

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Julie the exclusive management of their life together without reserving for himself even the right to veto.

THE TRUTH was that Marc was shy with women to the point of reticence. Too busy and too earnest in the struggle to establish the agency in the early, salty days of his youth, he had simply missed all of the ordinary experiences, the fretful trials and errors, due the average young man bent on gaining a solid footing in life's more fundamental departments. In effect, Marc had never taken the time to brace himself against the Indian hand wrestle that sex can often become in this civilized world. He could never be a rake, either at home or abroad, simply because he hadn't had time to practice.

Not that Marc didn't have the impulse for rakishness. It had merely come too late. He had always suspected that there was a more satisfactory and satisfying way of life than his, but only vaguely. There were even moments when he yearned for it desperately, without ever rightly knowing precisely what it was he yearned for.

At the time when he asked Julie to be his wife, he believed that he was at last making the proper step towards a new kind of life. After all, in spite of all the tons of fiction to the contrary, it is still not considered entirely orthodox for a business executive to marry his secretary. Marriage with Julie had seemed, to Marc, to offer the sort of life he coveted. Then, she had been as casual and convention-free a girl as any man would care to split a pint of gin with in a butler's pantry. Not that Marc ever had, however.

Even then, though, had Marc been better schooled in matters of maids, mates and matrimony, he might have recognized in the cool blue of Julie's eyes, in the precise way she carried her statuesque body, the seeds of wedded woodenness. As it was, the revelation did not occur until after that fatal moment at the altar.

The wedding ceremony had worked a magic in Julie that, to Marc's mind, was as black as pure onyx. Instantly, she had become a rigid suburban matron, corseted tightly in all the whaleboned dictates of suburban respectability. Under Julie's efficient supervision Marc had found himself settled down with a thud that was almost audible.

Julie took up club work with a fire and fervor that was truly frightening. She ran for election to committees and officerships with a wind and stamina that would have been admirable in an Olympic torchbearer. She sat on more boards than a lumber mill laborer at lunch time. Every book of etiquette written by man, woman or child found its way into her library, and she stuck to the rules with all the tenacity of an umpire on a World Series game. Worst of all, though, she took to brewing weak tea and making watercress sandwiches. Briefly, Julie had become that odious thing: the perfectly terrible perfect wife.

If Marc grew sallow and sullen under this regime, Julie's smiling and well-modulated suggestion was that he take up a hobby and turn his mind to something constructive. To her own purposes, as well as everyone else's, she might have done better to keep her pretty mouth shut. It was this suggestion that gave birth to the basement laboratory and the madness that followed...

It is difficult to believe that any man of so steady a nature as Marc Pillsworth would seriously conceive the idea of chemically treating metals and other weighted materials

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in such a way as to make them lighter than air. Yet, that precisely is the madness that wormed its way into Marc's mind.

The idea had developed slowly. For almost a month, from his office window, Marc had watched the construction of the building across the street. The main difficulty, as the building stretched lazily upward, obviously was the transportation of the heavier materials. That was the thing that made the work so slow.

A BIT AT a time, the idea took hold of Marc that the job could be immensely facilitated if only the steel girders, the sections of concrete, could be made buoyant....at least temporarily....so that they might be floated into position rather than lifted. Eventually came the time when the idea had lain long enough in Marc's mind that it seemed to make sense. Of course it was a fantastic idea, but the really fantastic thing about it was that no little men in white jackets arrived on the scene to carry its originator gently but firmly away to some quiet institution.

And yet time proved Marc to be not quite so mad as he seemed. Subsequent experiments testified to his rather extraordinary if distorted vision. In a year's time, hit and miss, he had managed to reduce the weight of scraps of iron and steel by actual test....and this without diminishing their bulk by so much as a fraction of an inch. Of course, Marc had to admit, both of these materials had clung doggedly to a nasty disinclination to actually defy the laws of gravity, but he was convinced that he was well on the way to breaking their will in the matter.

Months of paper work followed, tedious calculations, corrected formula. At last he was ready to prepare what he was positive would be his final and conclusive experiment. Ingredients were carefully distilled and combined, in exact amounts and weights. And then, on the very night that Julie had manoeuvered the exclusive Daughters of the Golden Gardenia into her living room with an eye to arranging a society bazaar, Marc retired to his basement sanctuary, carefully closed the door, added the final chemical to the growing mixture, and blew the bejesus out of everything. If the laws of gravity had finally been broken it was only by virtue of rude detonation. The experiment, in its major aspect, was a dud.

All these things passed fluidly through Marc's mind as he lay awake gazing into the silver clarity of the night. He wondered at his own serenity in the face of so much disappointment and could not account for it. A strange faith in the future, unnourished by tangible fact, had begun to grow within him, a definite, thriving growth sustained by the night and the moonlight.

How could he know it was the weed growth of violence?

Then Marc stirred turned his head at a listening angle. The night was no longer silent; the stillness had been broken by a strand of distant melody. Faintly, a voice had begun to sing, weaving a curious, indistinct thread of song into the illusive fabric of the night. For a moment Marc wondered if he only imagined it, but when he covered his ears with his hands, the melody stopped. He listened again. Slowly, the song grew louder, more distinct.

Marc sat bolt upright in bed. "Well, I'll be damned!" he said.

He was sure of it; the singing was actually coming from somewhere inside the house. And if the voice had a strange, illusive quality it was only

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because it was patently alcoholic. Obviously some drunken woman was lurching about below stairs singing her vaporish head off. Marc threw back the covers and swung out of bed. What if his harshness had driven Julie to drink!

In the hallway outside his room, Marc paused to listen. The voice was gaining wind and growing louder by the second. Marc started indignantly; the song, if he wasn't mistaken, was at least badly soiled if not downright filthy. It had something to do with the lurid misadventures of a loose moraled sturgeon named Gussie during the spawning season. At least it couldn't be Julie. Fumbling with the sash of his robe, Marc went to the stairs and marched determinedly downward.

In the lower hall he paused by the door to the living room to take a sounding. Sighting on a distant burp, he started toward the rear of the house. He had just passed the study when the singing suddenly stopped. Marc stopped also, waiting for the voice to continue. He moved slowly in the direction of the kitchen, careful that his own footfall did not disturb the silence. The kitchen, brilliant with moonlight, was uninhabited. Marc slipped back to the hallways and waited. Suddenly a new series of sounds were unleashed on the night; the clinking of bottles, a light giggle and a subdued hiccough.

MARC, CERTAIN now of his destination, whirled about, went to the basement door and threw it open. No longer cautious, he stepped into the darkness and started down the steps with a tread that bespoke his outrage.

There was no question in his mind; some neighborhood swain, in an amorous mood, had enticed the giggling and subnormal object of his sordid affections to the wine cellar. No doubt the pair were fairly wallowing in depravity amongst the bins at this very moment. The cheek of the young devil! And the girl! Getting drunk on wine that was not hers and singing about it! Certainly she was no better than she should be, and probably so much worse as to be beyond conception.

Marc quitted the steps, picked his way over a heap of rubble and presented himself solidly in the ragged patch of moonlight that described the hole left in the wall by the explosion. He planted his feet ominously apart and doubled his fists.

"All right, you two," he said in a level, distinct voice. "Show yourselves. If you're in any condition."

The silence filled in quickly in the wake of his voice. Marc pursed his lips and peered into the deep shadows of the wine cellar.

"If you don't come out," he said, "I'll damn well come in here and drag you out. How would you like that?"

Then he started as his question was answered with a muffled giggle.

Marc bristled. "Very well," he announced, "here I come!"

He strode to the wine cellar and presented himself firmly in the doorway. "One last chance," he said. "Are you coming out?"

He waited in the ensuing silence, suddenly assailed by a strange feeling of indecision. Then he cried out with dismay as a slender arm suddenly darted out into the moonlight and coiled gracefully about his neck.

"Now, just a minute!" Marc gasped.

But the arm did not hesitate. Tightening about his neck, it drew him toward the darkness. Instantly, a pair of warm lips pressed down on his own.

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Marc struggled to free himself, but the mouth was extraordinarily tenacious. And another arm had joined the other about his neck. Then Marc freed his mouth and sputtered with objections.

"What do you think you're doing?" he demanded.

A winey breath impressed itself on Marc's nostrils. "Don't you know?" a voice murmured softly. "You should."

"Let go of me," Marc said stiffly.

"Not in a million years," the voice replied huskily. "I'm going to stick to you like skin. Forever and ever and ever and. . . ."

"We'll see about that," Marc grated. "Whoever you are, you're trespassing. In more ways than one."

Reaching up he grasped the arms about his neck and attempted to disentangle them. They only tightened their hold. He tried to duck under the arms, but they moved downward as he did. For a moment Marc and his amorous captor crouched together in the dark, literally cheek by jowl. The other giggled.

"I'll bet we look terribly funny," she said.

"Stop that damned giggling," Marc fumed. "Things are bad enough without that."

He had decided on a strategy to free himself. In one quick movement he straightened up and stepped backwards. It might have worked perfectly if he hadn't stumbled over a piece of wreckage. As it was he suddenly sprawled backwards and fell to the floor in the exact center of the patch of moonlight. His winey companion, true to her promise, accompanied him in his downward plunge with skin-like precision. She landed against Marc's chest with a sigh of satisfaction.

"May I take this as capitulation?" she asked. "Or was it only an accident?"

"Don't be so disgusting," Marc said. Then, gazing upward, he suddenly blanched. His mouth fell slack. The girl had loosened her hold on his neck and was sitting up, gazing down at him. In his confusion Marc didn't even notice that the thing she was sitting on was his stomach. The girl was the same one in the dream. The girl was Toffee!

"Oh, Lord!" he moaned. "You're. . . .!"

"Of course," Toffee said brightly. "I made it. I'm here."

"Then this is really a dream," Marc said dazedly. "I'm still in bed asleep. I only dreamed I woke up and came down here."

"Wrong, son," Toffee said briefly. "This is no dream. This is for real."

MARC STARED at her in disbelief. "Wait a minute. . ." he breathed. Then he reached out a hand, touched her, and quickly drew it away.

"That's the general idea," Toffee said.

Marc drew back with a gasp. "You're really here!"

"I have other ways of proving it," Toffee said. She leaned toward him.

"No!" Marc cried. "But. . . .but . . . .how. . . .!"

Toffee smiled. "It's very simple. You've projected me through your awareness. I guess I must have made quite an impression on you in that dream. Heavens knows I tried, but I didn't think I was really getting any psychic cooperation. Anyway, I managed to stick to the conscious part of your mind instead of the subconscious, and you projected me into reality."

"Oh, no!" Marc gasped. "No! This can't happen! I didn't mean it! You've got to go back!"

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"Too late now," Toffee said. She removed herself from Marc's middle and plumped herself down beside him. "There's no use fighting it. You can't control it. Of course I'll disappear and return to your mind whenever you go to sleep. You'll stop projecting me then. But I'll be right back again the moment you wake up." She sighed happily. "I'm so tickled I could pop."

"Don't!" Marc cried. Anything was easily within the realm of possibility now. "What am I going to do with you?"

Toffee cast him a sidelong glance. "I could make a list of suggestions," she murmured, "and we could run through them in the order named. And if there are any terms you don't understand I'll explain them."

"Holy smoke!" Marc said, staring at her. "Haven't you any sense of decency at all?"

"None worth mentioning," Toffee answered. "Should I have?"

"No one ever needed anything worse," Marc said emphatically.

Toffee glanced curiously about her. "This place is a mess," she commented. "Is your whole world as shabby as this?"

Marc shook his head, explained briefly about the explosion.

"I don't understand about human beings," Toffee said. "The minute they get their hands on anything they have to start changing it so that it serves a purpose exactly opposite what it was intended for. What goes up must come down, what goes down must come up. You're all perfectly mad, all of you. Are you happy that you've managed to make heavy things light?"

"What?" Marc asked absently.

"I asked you if you were happy now that you've managed to make all that stuff behave contrary to its nature, rather indecently I might add."

"What are you talking about?" Marc asked.

"All that stuff floating around on the ceiling," Toffee said. She pointed.

Marc whirled about to gaze in the direction she indicated. Then he sucked in his breath with a sharp gasp. Toffee had spoken the truth. Slowly, the rubble was rising from the floor of the basement to the ceiling. Some of it had already described the full journey and was hovering about the ceiling. Chairs, pieces of desk, desk drawers, fragments of equipment, scraps of metal were bobbing about next to the ceiling like apples in a washtub on Hallowe'en. Marc suddenly felt very lightheaded. In a matter of minutes the world had become an unfamiliar place; reality quickly slipped away from him and he was caught for a moment in a spell of moon-splashed madness.

"My God!" he whispered. "I did it!"

"You certainly did," Toffee said. "Now how are you going to get all that stuff down again?"

UNEXPECTEDLY, Marc jumped to his feet, made a quick lunge toward a small black book that was rising rapidly toward the ceiling. But he was too late; it moved beyond his reach and came to a solid rest against the ceiling.

"Damn!" Marc said.

"What is it?" Toffee asked.

"The book that I recorded my formulas in," Marc said. "I have to have it. When this gets out...."

Toffee rose to his side and placed her arms around his neck.

"For heaven's sake!" Marc said. "Can't you think of anything else?"

"It's difficult," Toffee said. "But at the moment I'm trying to help you. Lift me up and I'll reach the

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book for you."

"Oh," Marc said. He held his hands down for her to step into, then boosted her up. As she rose above him he was surprised at how light she was. He glanced up. One hand on his shoulder, Toffee was stretching the other toward the wayward book. She didn't quite make it. She glanced down at Marc.

"Hold steady," she said. Then she let go of his shoulder and stood upright, depending entirely on his hands for support. She reached out, caught hold of the book, and smiled down at him. It was just as she was bending down again that she lost her balance.

In the next instant Marc's head and shoulders became the center of what seemed to be a dozen flailing arms and legs.

In an effort to save the situation, Marc stepped back and held out his arms, just in time for Toffee to strike him solidly on the chest. In the tangle that followed they both tumbled to the floor. When Marc looked up Toffee was once more seated comfortably and safely on his stomach. She looked down at him and laughed.

"Does it strike you that a certain monotony has come into our relationship?" she asked.

"It strikes me that a certain pain has come into my stomach," Marc wheezed. "Would you be kind enough, I wonder, to take a seat elsewhere for a change? Or am I going to have to wear you like a watch fob from now on?"

Toffee eyed his midsection with scorn. "If you think that shriveled bladder of yours is so comfortable, you just ought to try sitting on it sometime."

"That would make an interesting spectacle," Marc commented acidly. "If I'm not comfortable to sit on it's probably because you landed on me so hard you're on my spine. Get off."

"A pleasure," Toffee said and slid to the floor beside him. "Here's that silly book of yours." Without thinking, except to express her contempt for Marc's central region as a seating arrangement, she tossed the book in his direction. The book described a small arc toward Marc, then promptly swooped upward in rapid ascent.

"Oh, my gosh!" Marc said. He sat up and grabbed just in time. "Let's not. . . .!"

Suddenly he stopped as a series of footsteps sounded on the floor above.

"Julie!" he hissed in a stage whisper. "My wife!"

"Marc!" Julie's voice called distinctly. "Marc! Where are you? What was all that noise?"

Marc turned to Toffee. "Go!" he said. "Vanish!"

Toffee gazed blandly on his distress. "I can't," she said, "unless you go to sleep, of course. I couldn't if I wanted to. Which I don't."

"Oh, Lord!" Marc groaned. He stood for a moment, torn.

"Marc!"

Julie was approaching the basement doorway now.

"I've got to go," Marc rasped. "You stay here. Promise?"

Toffee smiled and nodded. "Sure," she said. "But you'll come back, won't you? Because if you don't I'll stir up enough hell down here to raise the dead."

"I'll come back," Marc promised desperately, and started rapidly toward the steps.

"Just a minute," Toffee said. She held her arms out to him. "Kiss me goodbye."

"No," Marc said.

"I'll scream," Toffee said coolly. "I'll yowl like a banshee."

Marc went quickly back to her. "It's not as though I won't be right

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back. Just a little while . . ."

"That's all right," Toffee murmured. She slid her arms smoothly around his neck. "This is just so you won't forget."

"Marc!" Julie called from upstairs. "Where are you? What are you doing? Answer me!"

CHAPTER III

MARC STEPPED into his room and closed the door, but gently, leaving it still open just a crack. He listened. Across the hall, Julie went into her room, closed the door. There was an interval of silence, then the sound of restless movement inside.

Julie's manner downstairs had been tentative, apprehensive and almost frighteningly gentle. She had seemed to believe Marc's story about investigating noises but she had asked once too often if he was feeling well, if the explosion hadn't left him with a terrible headache.

Marc closed the door all the way, went over to the bed, and sat down to wait; she'd settle down in time and then he could return to the basement. He looked around absently and as his gaze passed the window he noticed that the first faint wash of day had come into the sky outside. He reached to the nightstand, picked up a cigarette and lit it. He took a deep draft and blew the smoke out thinly, thoughtfully. With worried bewilderment he considered the fading night's absurdities.

It was as though, in creating the explosion and upsetting the laws of gravity, he had thrown all the processes of the universe out of kilter—as though all the natural laws were balanced precariously one atop the other, so that when one was broken or removed, all the others came tumbling down to shatter at your feet in consequence. A redheaded dream could come to life and laugh and sing and guzzle your wine and raise hell in general all over the lot. Things that were never meant to could begin to float through the air. It was a disconcerting state of affairs just to contemplate, let alone experience. Nature had certainly gone on a bender tonight and no mistake. If these things could happen what else might not be possible? Marc dreaded to think.

If Marc had been able to look into the unknown regions beyond the universe he might have had a quick answer to his question. But not a reassuring one. . . .

* * *

In a timeless, unboundaried place, an entity sat cross-legged on a drifting piece of atmosphere and gazed with jaundiced and disconsolate eye toward the regions of Eternity. He looked unhappily on the undiscovered planets whirling and drifting in the distance and said an extremely vulgar and basic word. He plucked a handful of atmosphere from the piece on which he sat, untangled his long legs from beneath his misted robes, and, in a modified way, drop-kicked it into the hereafter. He repeated the word.

George Pillsworth, the spirit of Marc Pillsworth, was bored to the socks with the world beyond. He frowned, and the face of Marc Pillsworth expressed disfavor. He leaned forward and dangled his hands between his knees, and it was the lean body of Marc Pillsworth that leaned and the thin hands of Marc Pillsworth that dangled. There, however, the resemblance rocked to a jarring stop.

The message vibrations came trembling across space again, but George didn't bother to listen to them. It was probably just the message center at its eternal business; probably

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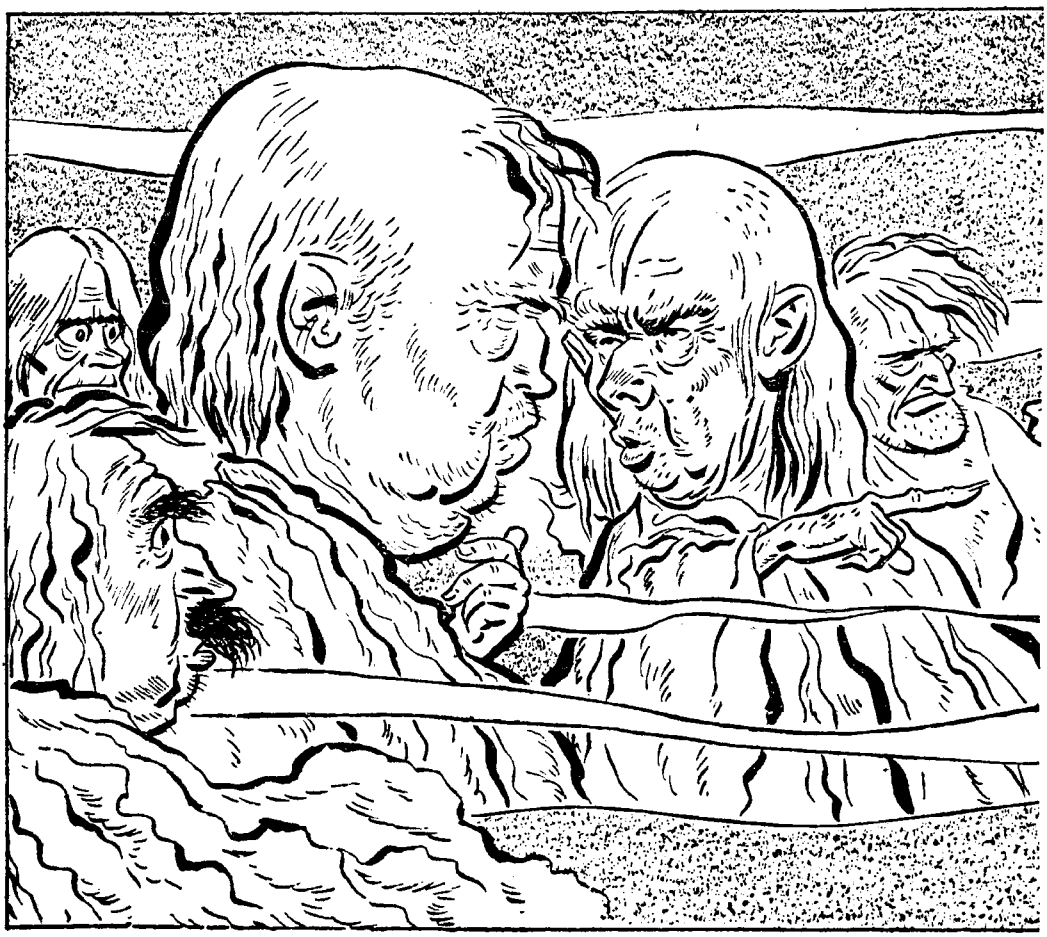

George stood meekly in the cloud-mists while the Council discussed his case . . .

another relay broadcast forwarding the same old answers to the same old mediums down on earth. The question came constantly for the upper level spirits: Are you happy, Uncle Howard? Are you happy, Sister Martha? Always the same silly question. The devil of it was that no one was ever allowed to give them a truthful answer; the News Control Board took care of that. The answer was always the same....probably recorded, George suspected....transmitted from the message center: I am in a beautiful place. I am very happy.

Very happy, indeed. In this place? George didn't know about the Kingdoms; maybe they were all right, but this place was.... Well, no, it couldn't be that. But why didn't they tell the truth for once: I'm in the dullest place in time, and if I had any blood I'd open my veins.

THE THOUGHT of transmitting such a message to those bothersome earthly mediums pleased George immensely. That would rock them back on their heels and stop their silly questions. He leaned back on his atmosphere ledge and smiled for the first time in several days. Then suddenly he sat up as the transmitted vibrations grew more intense, and his own name sounded across time.

"George Pillsworth! George Pills-

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worth! Report instantly to the High Council! Instantly! Shake a leg, you shabby spook!"

George's expression was instantly troubled. "Now what have they found out about?" he sighed.

George paused to recount in his mind his more recent sins. Last week he had heard that humans often became quite rich by distilling spirits and had tried the process on a few of his friends. He had come close to narrowing the circle of his acquaintances to a positive noose. But they'd already had him on the carpet for that. All in all, a muggy affair. He shrugged resignedly, dissolved and concentrated his impulses toward the Council Chambers....

An instant later George rose through the grey mists of the Chamber. He looked tentatively at the Council and quickly averted his gaze; to an entity, the Council stared back at him without affection or beauty. George cleared his throat nervously.

"George Pillsworth, spiritual part to the mortal Marc Pillsworth, reporting as instructed," he said.

"And not a moment too soon," the Head commented bleakly. "Face the Council, please. If you've the gall."

Guardedly, George raised his eyes to the Council. The sight was not heartwarming. The Council, under the very best circumstances, was not attractive.

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In a nasty mood it could be inconceivably ugly. Comprised of five members who prided themselves on being only concerned with the most profound matters of Eternity, the Council was not given to pursuits of vanity. It looked like hell and was proud of it.

The Head had not been misnamed. An entity who functioned entirely on an intellectual plane, his body had dwindled through the years while his head had become enlarged. Now he was the proud possessor of the biggest, shaggiest, most formidable toppiece extant. The others were of a similar stamp, but to a lesser degree. Two of them had fairly well developed arms and shoulders but they did their best to hide the fact beneath their robes since it was a clear indication of inferior mentality. The one who was unfortunate enough to be cursed with rather a good set of legs was obviously to be regarded as not much of an intellect at all, a mere messenger boy or literally a leg man. To face the Council, then, was quite a lot to ask. Almost too much, as far as George was concerned.

"He's got the gall for anything," one of the armed intellects commented nastily. "Remember when he was caught selling bogus passports to ascending spirits?"

George blanched. He wished they would concentrate on the present and stop dragging up the past.

The Head cleared his throat with a formidable rattle. "I think we can adhere to the matter at hand without involving personalities," he said. "The fact that the Pillsworth entity is a spirit of the utmost depravity has already been established in this Council so often that the whole subject begins to take on the aspect of a broken record. We'll come to that later if we must." There was another clearing of the throat. "The entity will approach the Council."

"Forgive me, your honor," one of the minor members of the Council intercepted. "But do you think that's really wise? I know it's part of the prescribed procedure, but mightn't we leave it out, just this once? I don't trust him a step nearer than he is already."

"I don't trust him that close," another of the members put in. "Couldn't we reverse the procedure and have him go away from the Council?"

The Head nodded. "You have a point there," he said. He looked at George. "Pillsworth, retreat three steps backwards and stand at attention."

"I meant go away altogether," the member murmured disappointedly. "I was hoping we could forget the whole thing."

GEORGE TOOK three steps backwards and assumed what he supposed could pass for a position of attention. He tried to look alert.

"Is this correct, sir?" he asked.

"The entity will remain silent until requested to speak!" the Head thundered. "We'll tell you when you're wrong. Oh, brother!"

"Yes," said one of the others. "For heaven's sake don't let him get started. He'll be talking us into giving him a down payment on the acres of Heaven."

"Yes," the Head agreed. "And now to the business at hand." He regarded George with even less approval than before. "It is the custom of the Council to advise and instruct every entity before he or she is released to the world below. He is to be charged here with his allotment of ectoplasm and called upon to swear from memory

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to the ten fundamental oaths as set down in the Haunter's Handbook and Guide. Do you feel that you are prepared for the ceremony, Pillsworth, or would you like to request a delay for study and contemplation?"

George shifted excitedly. He could hardly contain himself. This was the moment for which he had been waiting through all these eternal years. At last he was to be released to Earth. His heart fairly sang. From all he'd heard, Earth was precisely the place where his talents and aptitudes would find their proper market. He was so choked with emotion he could hardly answer.

"I am prepared," he said weakly.

"However," the Head continued with new emphasis, "there is considerable doubt as to the status under which you shall be released to the Earth...that, not going into the Earth's fitness to rise to the occasion of your arrival. It appears that your earthly past, Marc Pillsworth, has departed life, but there is a small degree of uncertainty about the whole affair. It is known that Marc Pillsworth was caught in a violent explosion in the basement of his home, and since then his cosmic radiations have broken. It is possible, considering the nature of the explosion, that there may be a chemical interference involved here if the chemical processes of Pillsworth himself have undergone some sort of change. However, it's not likely.

"At any rate, no request for reservations has been received under the name of Pillsworth in any of the upper planes, and this has caused us to be uncertain. Still, we cannot risk the possibility of a slip-up. When a mortal dies his haunt must be dispatched instantly to his friends and loved ones. It's always been that way." The Head eyed George and suddenly looked sad. "It just happens that the Pillsworth's are unlucky."

"I will endeavor..." George began earnestly.

"Silence!" The Head bellowed. "We know what you'll endeavor to do, you devil. Anyway, it has been decided, against all reason and better judgment, that you shall be dispatched to Earth as per schedule. But only on a probationary and exploratory basis. In other words, it will be your mission to go to earth and determine whether Marc Pillsworth is really dead or not. If he is, you will remain and perform your duties according to the code. If, however, he proves still to be alive—and let me emphasize this—you will depart the earth and return instanter. And not a moment later. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir," George offered timidly.

"And now," the Head continued, "there is the matter of your character. If it deserves the name. Actually, you are the most characterless spirit I have ever had the displeasure to encounter. In you are combined all the base qualities which we strive so hard to fight in this region. Sometimes I find myself looking on you as a sort of trash dump in which are collected all the vile qualities which we have managed to cleanse from the other spirits. But that's only desperate rationalization. How you happen to be as you are I have never been able to figure out. It appears that for every virtue your earthly part has acquired you have embraced an additional evil. At any rate, you are no angel, and that's the very least I have to say on the matter.

"The point is that we do not dare to hope that you will stick to the accepted and orthodox procedures of haunting, let alone be even the least bit of consolation to Pillsworth's survivors. We only ask—no, we demand

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—that you do not disgrace the fine traditions of haunting. It will be plainly understood that you may be recalled and punished at any time should you get so far out of line as to be an embarrassment to us. In other words, Pillsworth, watch your step. Is that clear?"

"Yes, sir," George said mildly. He gazed down at his toes, dissolved them nervously. "Yes, indeed, sir."

"Very well, then," the Head said. "You will prepare to take the oath by swearing from memory to the ten rules. Raise your right hand." He turned to one of his colleagues on the bench. "If this isn't a hollow mockery, I've never seen one," he muttered.

The favored entity nodded. "As hollow as Aunt Maggie's bustle," he said. "And twice as tacky."

George raised his right hand and solemnly lifted his eyes in a heavenward direction. The ten rules, transcribed there sometime before in hopeful anticipation of this moment, had remained quite legible on the sleeve of his atmospheric robe.

FULLY DRESSED now and returned to the edge of his bed, Marc watched the first faint beginnings of night's evolution into day. Since he had kindly been spared any knowledge of the other force which had been released by the explosion in the basement, his thoughts concerned themselves with the staggering circumstance of Toffee and the buoyant debris. He rose, crossed to the door, and listened for any sound from across the hall. It was quiet there now.

Leaving the door, he went to the bureau at the far side of the room, cautiously opened the top drawer, careful to keep his hand over the opening, and caught the little black book as it gained freedom and shot upward. He put it in the breast pocket of his jacket and fastened it there by clasping his pen over it. Then he crossed quickly to the wardrobe, took out a light topcoat, draped it over his arm, and returned to the door. He paused again to listen, then shoved the door open and stepped silently out into the hallway.

In the basement, at the bottom of the steps, he paused and glanced tentatively about, braced himself against an attack from the redhead. He waited a moment, then called Toffee's name.

There was a moment of quiet, then a slight rustling as Toffee appeared from the shadows of the wine bins. She raised her arms above her head and stretched with a languorous yawn. In the grey light of early morning her apparel, or rather the lack of apparel, was even more startling than it had been during the night. Marc glanced quickly away and held out the coat.

"Here," he said distractedly. "Put this on. And button it up all the way down."

Toffee looked at the coat without interest. "What for?" she asked with bland innocence. "And, besides, how can I button it up and down at the same time?"

"Never mind," Marc said. "Just cover your nakedness."

"My nakedness?" Toffee said. "Why in the world would I want to cover it? What's wrong with it? I have a perfectly divine nakedness. I'll match my nakedness with yours any time..."

"No!" Marc broke in. "Don't go on."

"Well, with anyone's nakedness, then, if you're going to be edgey. I haven't anything to be ashamed of."

"If you did," Marc said bitterly, "you wouldn't have the decency to be ashamed of it. Put the coat on and

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stop wasting time."

Toffee shrugged bewilderedly and took the coat from his outstretched hand. "Oh, well," she said, slipping it on, "if you're going to make a scene about anything so silly. Where are we going?"

"I wish I knew," Marc said wearily. "Anywhere away from here. Obviously, you can't hang around here where Julie will run into you."

"No," Toffee said mildly. "I suppose not. Though it would be fun to see her reaction. Might do her a world of good." She waved a hand at the wreckage clustered on the ceiling. "What about that? What are you going to do about your experiment?"

Marc shrugged. "I have to think about that later, when I've got you out of my hair."

Together, they proceeded to the hole in the wall. Marc lifted Toffee out, then boosted himself after. Toffee reached down to give him a hand.

"Don't look so glum," she said. "Nothing really awful has happened. Not yet."

"Be quiet," Marc said.

He led her to the garage at the back of the house, cautiously lifted the door and indicated a large green convertible. "Get in," he instructed.

"I am your slave," Toffee said with mock subservience. "Take me where you will." She got into the car.

Mincing slightly, Marc slid into the seat beside her. "Be quiet," he said. "Let's try to get out of here without waking up Julie."

IT WAS unfortunate that Marc, in his haste to remove Toffee from the premises, did not have the foresight to raise the top of the convertible. With that one small act of protection he might have secured a clean getaway. As it was, with him and Toffee exposed and plain to the eyes of the world, he threw the convertible into gear and backed out of the garage toward just about the most slipshod escape ever enacted by man.

As the car slid smoothly down the drive, Marc switched off the ignition so that it might coast soundlessly past that part of the house which held the window to Julie's room. It was precisely at this point, of course, that tragedy befell. The black book twisted itself lose in Marc's pocket and suddenly shot upward.

"Oh, good grief!" Marc said. He put on the brakes.

As he and Toffee watched, the book sailed higher, flitted a bit to one side and lodged itself in a cross-section of trellis precisely next to Julie's window.

"What are you going to do?" Toffee whispered.

"Climb up and get it, I suppose," Marc said wretchedly. "I can't leave it there." He got out of the car, then turned back. "Don't you make a move while I'm gone."

Toffee nodded vigorously and pulled the collar of her coat up around her face. "I'll be positively furtive," she giggled.

Marc made his way to the trellis, tested it with his foot, and started up. Several feet up, he paused to listen. Then, reassured, he continued upward. A moment later he was within reaching distance of the book. He sighed with relief.

Down in the car Toffee watched without great concern. However, she was anxious to be away; it was dull just sitting there. She looked around for some way to hasten matters. It was then that she conceived the idea of starting the car so that they could continue their flight the moment Marc returned to the ground. She glanced

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at the profusion of knobs on the elaborate dash board, thoughtfully selected the prettiest, and twisted...

It was in the same moment that Marc reached for the little book and caught hold of it, that the early morning suddenly thundered with a booming rendition of "Anchors Aweigh!" performed by a marine band. All at once, drums throbbed, cymbals clanged and bugles blared with all the crashing enthusiasm that a hundred healthy seagoing men could muster.

Marc whirled about, clinging to the trellis, and stared down at Toffee in horror. But Toffee was too busy frantically twisting knobs to notice. The music swelled and became louder as windows began to fly open all over the neighborhood. On the trellis, Marc was assailed with a chill feeling that there were eyes on the back of his neck. As he turned about, his nose came within a fraction of brushing Julie's.

"Oh, Lord!" he moaned in belated prayer.

"Marc Pillsworth!" Julie shrieked, leaning further out the window. "What are you doing? Have you lost your mind?" Then her astonished gaze moved to the car and Toffee. "Who is that woman?"

Marc glanced distractedly down at Toffee, as though seeing here there for the first time. "That's nobody," he murmured feebly.

And the next instant it seemed that he had almost spoken the truth, that indeed the car, Toffee and the pounding radio had never actually been there at all. As a unit, as Toffee's frantic hand quickly selected another button and pressed it, they all shot backwards out of the drive and out of sight. Toffee's shriek of dismay was added discordantly to the moan of a naval tuba and the scream of racing tires. Marc glanced desperately at the stunned, sleep-stained faces peering from the houses across the street and shudderingly closed his eyes. With the others, he waited for the sound of the crash. But it did not come.

"Marc Pillsworth...!" Julie began, then stopped as Toffee and the green convertible suddenly reappeared as swiftly and sensationally as they had departed. Still travelling backwards, the car shot into the drive with a spray of gravel and headed toward the house like a thing possessed. Toffee was wildly manipulating the wheel on a hit or miss basis.

"Help!" she screamed.

"Turn right!" Marc yelled from the trellis. "Turn right!"

Automatically, Toffee followed instructions. She grasped the wheel with both hands and pulled to the right. The car swerved, crashed over a flower bed and headed for the lawns. There, pawing turf like a reversed bull, it described a wide circle and started back for the drive.

Toffee waved elatedly to Marc over her shoulder. "Now I've got it!" she cried. "It's easy!" Apparently, she did not realize that she had learned to drive backwards, that there was another way of directing the mechanism.

Racing the car to the area in front of the garage, she whipped it around down the drive again. She looked up at Marc.

"Jump as I come past!" she yelled.

"Who is that?" Julie shrieked, finally recovering her voice. "Answer me! Marc Pillsworth, stay right where you are!"

"Jump!" Toffee yelled. "Now!"

Marc landed on the seat beside Toffee and felt himself borne, as if by the wind itself, down the drive.

The band swung into a booming ar-

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rangement of "Don't Give Up The Ship!" as, hind bumper first, they skidded into the street and sped away...

CHAPTER IV

THE TOWERS of the Wynant Hotel, a snobbish establishment whose austere front hulked over the general public with stoney aloofness, marked the center of the city.

Within, the Wynant shed upon its cowed clientele all the warmth and home-like comfort of a walk-in freezing unit. The personnel had obviously been trained to regard the paying guest as a fraud, a vandal and a momentary fugitive from social and moral levels so low as to be mainly inhabited by gophers.

As to decor, the Wynant had permitted itself only a single divergence from the completely austere. In the center of its vast foyer there was a fountain and pool, topped with the marble figure of a woman in the final stages of dishabille. The lady in question, however, was of a classic pedigree and, therefore, her condition of undress was permissible; one was allowed to look upon her classic charms without fear of suspicion from the bellhops. If the guests of the Wynant, who stayed there mainly for the dubious purposes of prestige, felt a certain affection for the lady of the fountain, it was because she, in her classic security, was accomplishing for them the very thing they had always longed to do themselves; she had presented herself solidly in the very center of the Wynant and caused an area of dampness thereupon. It did not matter that the lady clutched her nakedness to her in a fit of modesty; the guests of the Wynant knew what she really had on her mind and loved her for it with a devout intensity.

Marc had always considered the Wynant a veritable bully of a place, and this opinion was generally shared by a multitude of others. On the one occasion when he had gone to the Wynant to attend what was unanimously conceded to be the most stultifying businessmen's luncheon in the annals of human commerce, he had vowed never to set foot in the place again. However, there always comes a time to break even the most solemn of vows.

It was logic of a sort that caused Marc to bring Toffee to the Wynant; if there was any atmosphere chill enough to conquer the irrepressible redhead's wayward disposition, the Wynant had just such an atmosphere to offer in aces and spades. It was Marc's rather naive thought to banish Toffee to the more elevated regions of this spiritual salt mine and leave her there until, out of sheer, screaming boredom, she made up her mind to disappear to the place from whence she had come. Thus he would be free to make his peace with Julie and set his house in order in the several ways that it now required.

Noting the doorman's glance of disapproval as they entered, Marc carefully jockeyed himself into a position in front of Toffee so that she might be hidden from view. The top coat, several cuts too long both in the sleeves and the skirt, did little to give the girl an air of refinement. As rapidly as he could, Marc led her across the broad foyer to the desk at the opposite side of the room. Toffee flapped obediently along behind him, but her gaze moved curiously toward the fountain and its unclad mistress.

"Is that one of the guests taking a bath?" she asked innocently.

"Certainly not," Marc said. "It's a

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statue. That fact is quite evident."

Toffee's eyes narrowed suspiciously on the statue. "She looks awfully life-like to me."

"Don't worry," Marc said. "You won't have to take your bath in public."

"I wasn't worried," Toffee said absently.

THEY PROCEEDED to the desk and were instantly greeted by a clerk of a precise black-and-white perfection. Though the man was shorter than Marc he still seemed to look down on him from a great height.

"Yes?" he asked with a slight reptilian hiss.

Marc had prepared his story in advance. "I'd like a suite for my niece," he said.

The clerk regarded Marc's "niece" and her costume and notched up the last small measure of slack in his eyebrows.

"I'm Marc Pillsworth," Marc said hopefully, "of the Pillsworth Advertising Agency."

The clerk regarded Marc with a cool steadiness that indicated all too plainly that anyone engaged in advertising, in the opinion of the Wynant, was nothing more than a not-so-high-class ballyhoo artist. Then he glanced down at the polished surface of the counter as though expecting to see three shells and a pea suddenly appear there.

"And your niece's luggage?" he asked.

"My niece was in an accident," Marc said quickly. "Her luggage was lost, burned. She's in town to replace the things that were destroyed."

"I see," the clerk said, obviously mulling over the very interesting fact that Toffee had managed to be caught in the accident in nothing but a gentleman's topcoat.

"It was so embarrassing," Toffee put in tragically.

"I daresay," the clerk said sourly. He turned back to Marc. "I'm afraid the hotel is completely filled."

Marc sighed. Now he would have to discover some other disposition for Toffee. But suddenly he was too tired to even think. All at once he was overcome with such a feeling of fatigue that he could hardly restrain himself from leaning down to rest his head on the desk counter. He was exhausted beyond belief. He tried to turn away, but he hadn't even the strength for that. And then his eyes began to play tricks. As he looked at them, the clerk, Toffee, the desk blurred and became hazy. He felt that he was slipping into unconsciousness but he had no sensation of falling. Rather, it was as though he were simply floating away from reality. Reality dimmed, faded away and was gone... Then suddenly everything jumped back into place with startling clarity. It was as though he had traveled a long, long journey in a space of seconds.

"Marc!" Frightenedly.

It was Toffee who had screamed, and Marc turned quickly toward her. Then he came close to screaming himself. Something had happened to the girl. She had grown so terribly short all of a sudden! And the clerk too. Neither of them rose to a height quite even with his waist. They were both staring up at him in open-mouthed horror.

"What's happened to you?" Marc gasped.

"To us!" Toffee cried. "It's you! What are you doing up there?"

"Up where?" Marc asked. Then suddenly he glanced about him, and his breath made a startled rattling

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sound at the back of his throat.

At once, Marc could neither deny nor believe what he saw. A dreadful confusion crowded his senses as he regarded the space of thin air that stretched between his feet and the floor. Impossibly he had elevated to a height of about three feet. And he was still rising!

"Oh, Lord!" he yelled.

"Please keep your voice down," the clerk said desperately. "It's bad enough what you're doing, without yelling about it. If this is some advertising stunt..."

"Keep my voice down?" Marc said unhappily. "I can't even keep myself down!"

"It's the explosion!" Toffee cried with sudden realization. "All that stuff floating around in the basement! Now you're doing it, too!"

"Oh, my God!" Marc cried. The exclamation was prompted simultaneously by the terrible realization of his condition and the fact that even while they had been talking he had risen an additional foot into the air.

"I'm going higher!"

THE CLERK steadied himself uncertainly against the counter. "Please, sir!" he quavered. "You'll have to stop that at once. I'll give you a room, a whole floor, if you'll only stop!"

"You shut up, you quivering ninny," Marc gritted. "Do you think I actually want to do this sort of thing?"

"I don't know," the clerk said uncertainly. "I can't think why you should. I'm sure I'd hate it myself."

"Here!" Toffee yelled. "Take my hand! I'll pull you down!"

Marc reached out to Toffee, but too quickly; the sudden movement caused him to veer away from her. He drifted to one side, revolved helplessly, then moved away.

"Help!" he yelled. "For Pete's sake, help!"

Toffee stood staring at him, too terror stricken to move. She watched, transfixed, as he soared drunkenly across the broad foyer, apparently marking the tide of the air conditioning.

"Oh, Mona!" she murmured. "He's sailing like a kite in an autumn wind!"

Up till this time the foyer had remained blissfully deserted, but this was not a condition destined to endure. At the worst possible moment, just as Marc drifted wordlessly past the doorway, a company of diners entered from the dining room. Four in all, two men and two women, they walked into the room, stopped, observed a figure going past overhead, floating lazily in mid-air like an agonized leaf on the tide, and fell into a tense silence. All four of them stared hauntedly into space for a time. Then one of the ladies, of a lesser fortitude than the others, reached out and took her companion's arm in a death grip.

"I could have sworn I saw...!"

The man, a portly individual with a grey, senatorial mane, reached out and, without hesitation, clapped a hand over the lady's mouth.

"No, you didn't, dear," he said quietly, "we just won't speak of it."

Together, the four turned and silently filed back into the dining room.

"I'd like to enquire about the brandy sauce," the old gentleman said through clenched teeth. "I may sue this place before I'm through."

In the meantime, Toffee had taken out in hot pursuit of Marc. "Grab something!" she panted, running along beneath him. "Grab something and hold on!"

The words came dimly to Marc through the pounding panic in his

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mind, but he obeyed them automatically. He reached out and felt frantically for something to take hold of. He had risen by now to a height of about eight feet and was circling toward the fountain. It was destiny that guided him to the statue.

He caught hold of the stone lady and grappled to make his grasp firm. If at this point in the proceedings the mistress of the fountain did not reach out and slap Marc it was more because she was made of stone than because of the place where he grabbed her. The effect bordered narrowly on the obscene and became even more questionable as Marc took a toe hold on the lady's mid-section. It was precisely at this moment that the elevator doors directly across from the fountain slid open and a delegation of conventioning club ladies arrived.

As a unit the ladies quitted the car, started forward, then stopped short. Twenty-two well-padded bosoms rose and fell sharply and twenty-two discreetly tinted mouths opened on a single gasp of horror.

"Would you look at that!" one of the ladies blurted.

"I'm trying not to," another answered in a shocked whisper. "What is he trying to do to her?"

"I shudder to think. But look where he's got hold of her!"

"I can't," another moaned, closing her eyes tight. "It's too awful! If anyone ever grabbed me like that. . . !" Her voice shuddered away into silence.

"Police!"

SO SOON did the others pick up the cry, there was no way of telling which of the ladies had started it. Suddenly, the foyer shrieked from end to end and top to bottom with a call to all officialdom to come and defend the honor of the beseiged statue. The ladies, milling frantically among themselves, were screaming themselves into a fair frenzy.

At the fountain Toffee was lending her voice to the general confusion. The sight of Marc clinging to another woman, whether of stone or flesh, did not set well with the redhead.

"You stop that!" she snapped, from the edge of the pool. "You let go of that marble huzzy before I come up there and knock her block off!"

"Don't be silly!" Marc called back unhappily. "She's not real. Besides, I can't let go!"

"I don't care about that," Toffee said. "What burns me up is what you're probably thinking up there."

"Good grief!" Marc cried. "I'm not thinking anything!"

"Oh, no?" Toffee sneered. "No man on earth could grab a woman the way you've grabbed that one and not be thinking something."

"Stop blathering nonsense," Marc said furiously, "and do something. Help me get down from here."

"You bet I will," Toffee said grimly. And with that she stepped lightly to the wall of the pool, peeled off her coat and stepped down into the water.

"No!" Marc yelled. "No!"

"Oh, my land!" one of the club ladies shrieked above the others. "Now there's a naked woman swimming around in the pool!"

"It's probably that poor statue trying to get away!" one of her sisters replied.

As Toffee swam toward the pedestal and the statue, the doors of the Wynant became crowded with shoving spectators who had been attracted by the din inside. The foyer began to fill rapidly. Behind the desk, a door opened and the manager of the Wynant ran to the desk clerk. He was a plum-cheeked, small man with dark hair and, at the moment, an extremely florid complexion. He grabbed the

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clerk by the shoulder and swung him around.

"What's going on here?" he demanded. He glanced toward the statue. "Who is that man up there? What is he doing? And that woman?"

The clerk trembled under his grasp. "I don't know," he said weakly. "I told them they couldn't stay here."

"Do something!" the manager piped. "This isn't a fun house!"

"Would you swear to it?" the clerk pleaded.

It was just as Toffee had reached the pedestal and was starting upward toward Marc and the statue that the elevator door slid open for a second time, and Mrs. Arbuthner-Wright, a small invalid of advanced years and means, manoeuvered her wheelchair into the tumultuous foyer. Mrs. Arbuthner-Wright had occupied the Wynant penthouse suite for almost twenty years now. Starting across the foyer, she braked her chair to a sudden stop and observed the activity at the fountain with an interested but unperturbed eye. She turned to the manager.

"Well, I'll be damned," she commented dryly. "It's about time this place got a floor show." She looked back at the statue. "You've got to give him credit for spunk. But I'll lay odds on the statue."

But the manager did not hear her. He only knew that the impossible had happened; the reputation of the Wynant had been placed in jeopardy. It had to be stopped at any cost. Shoving the trembling clerk aside, he dodged around the end of the desk and forced his way through the crowd to the brink of the pool. He climbed quickly to the wall of the pool just as Toffee reached Marc and went determinedly about the business of trying to dislodge him from his curvesome anchorage.

"There's no cause for excitement!" the manager yelled, turning to face the crowd. "It's really nothing!"

"Maybe you call it nothing," one of the club ladies snorted with fiery indignation.

"No! No!" the manager yelled. He held up his hands for quiet. "Listen to me! You don't understand! Nothing wrong is going on here!" It was better to defend these demented vandals than have the good name of the Wynant soiled. "These people are only cleaning the statue!"

"Oh, yeah!" a small, shabby-looking man sneered. "That statue'll never be clean again as long as she lives!"

THE MANAGER glanced wretchedly behind him and shuddered as he realized that current activities did nothing to substantiate the lie he had just told; never had so many pairs of grappling arms and legs combined themselves in one place to give such a glaring picture of pure, wanton abandon. With Marc clutching the statue, and Toffee clutching Marc, the statue seemed to be clutching herself with a new desperation that could never possibly have been achieved by mere chiseled stone; the poor dumb thing seemed suddenly to realize that not only her modesty but also her honor was at stake.

"Let go of her, you debauched floater!" Toffee hissed in Marc's ear. "Let go of her before I tear you apart!"

"I can't!" Marc panted, hanging on for dear life. "Do you want me to get spiked on the chandelier?"

"Better that than atrophied to this naked trollop!" Toffee said.

"If I were that statue," one of the club ladies whispered, "I'd never be able to face my friends again."

"Oh, I don't know, lady," said a rather dapper but vague-looking gentleman. "You know how statues are. They're always standing around with-

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out any clothes on and leering at each other. In that statue's crowd this sort of thing is just child's play."

"What kind of children play like that?" the woman snapped.

"What kind of children? Do I look like the kind of a man who goes around prying into the affairs of children?" He drew himself up. "Lady, are you trying to trap me into an argument about children?"

In the meantime the manager had turned his efforts from the outraged crowd to the entangled couple clinging to the statue.

"Come down from there!" he bawled. "Come down this instant!"

Almost as though at his command, the struggle on the statue came to an abrupt end. Marc, with a cry of warning, suddenly lost his grip and lurched to one side. Toffee tightened her hold on his neck and clung fast. In the next instant, entirely under the pull of Toffee's weight, they plunged together downward and into the pool below. There was a murmur from the crowd. Then there was a brief scream from the manager as, in jumping to avoid the splash, he lost his footing and joined the pair in the water.

The crowd watched tensely as the three heads disappeared beneath the surface of the pool, then soggily reappeared. A murmur of comment rose throughout the room, then suddenly silenced with a gasp.

One of the heads was not behaving at all as it should; it not only reappeared, but continued to move higher and higher into the air, dragging its lank and dripping body after it.

Slowly, Marc rose entirely out of the pool, hovered for a moment, and then came to rest, his feet resting lightly and exactly on the surface of the water. The soaking he had just received had provided him with enough extra poundage that his buoyancy had been somewhat tempered but not entirely destroyed. A smothered cry of dismay echoed around him as he stood blandly on the surface of the pool, then leaned forward to knock the water out of his ears.

The other two heads swiveled about to regard him with contrasting degrees of interest. For a moment the manager stared at Marc, then slowly sank out of sight again beneath the green obscurity of a lily pad.

Toffee turned graciously to the sea of gaping faces around her.

"Give me a hand someone," she said.

"Not me, lady," a man near the edge said. "With the company you keep, I wouldn't give you so much as a clipping off my fingernail."

Toffee glanced around for a volunteer, then suddenly dived down to join the manager beneath the lily pad.

Help was on its way at last and it wore a dark blue uniform. For the first time since its erection the lofty ceiling of the Wynant echoed back the firm and hurried tread of flat feet.

Across the room Mrs. Arbuthner-Wright wheeled her chair back into the elevator and smilingly plucked at the operator's sleeve.

"Remind me to renew my lease on the penthouse this week, Joe," she said. "After twenty years this place is beginning to be interesting."

CHAPTER V

MEANWHILE, Julie Pillsworth had not only lost her poise, but a shocking amount of bodily moisture; a good full-lunged cry in the private confines of her bed had done nothing to erase the memory of her husband disporting himself loosely about the landscape with a strange redhead under the very noses of their neighbors.

Julie dared not draw any conclusions concerning the affair of the trellis; there were too many emotions involved,

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As Marc held desperately to the statue, Toffee took hold of his leg and pulled . . .

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and she, having formed her marriage on what she firmly believed to be a solid foundation of logic and sound theory, was not practiced in the ways of emotion. Suddenly, emotionally, Julie was in a strange land without a guide, at a ball game without a program, up a creek without a paddle. Briefly, she was no end confused and upset.

Perhaps Julie might have eventually reached the right conclusion and even done the right thing, for in the back of her mind was the vague feeling that Marc's sudden burst of misbehavior was the result of some obscure failing in herself. She might have, that is, if May Springer and Jewel Drummer hadn't appeared on the scene just as her thoughts were turning in that direction.

May was a small, bird-boned, heron-faced woman with a voice as slight and chirping as the mentality which it served. Jewel was the other side of the picture: dog-jawed, thunder voiced and overwhelmingly double-breasted. These two had long since elected themselves to be Julie's "best friends," and now that Julie was in trouble they had come to help. In short, this was just the chance they had been waiting for.

The three women watched tensely as the maid left the tea things on the table and departed from the living room through the hall. Julie instantly returned her tear-stained face to her handkerchief. May and Jewel exchanged a look and hitched themselves forward in their chairs in the manner of a pair of ditch diggers rolling up their sleeves to go to work.

"I wouldn't hesitate a second," May piped. "I'd start divorcing the bum right now. The time to let him have it is the first minute you hear about the other woman. And, honey, you *saw* her! I did too for that matter. When that awful clatter started, and I looked out of my window and saw your husband with that woman . . . ! Well! I'll testify, honey! They'll never shut me up."

"Me too, dear," Jewel put in heavily from beyond the rolling hills of her bosom. "Of course I didn't actually see anything, but I heard it all. The only thing for you to do is just close up the house and go to Reno while it's all fresh in your mind. And let your lawyer do the talking. Remember that."

"I know you feel better, now that you've decided," May said. "Jewel and I will help you get your affairs with the house straightened up." She leaned forward and tapped Jewel lightly on the knee. "Won't we, Jewel?"

Julie looked up moistly from her handkerchief. "But I *haven't* decided," she wailed. "That's just it; I can't seem to decide anything. Marc has never done anything like this before. All of a sudden he just blew up the basement and started acting strange. I just can't get over the feeling that maybe it's partly my fault somehow . . ."

"Ridiculous!" Jewel snorted.

"Of course!" May chimed.

"Oh, I don't know," Julie said hopelessly. "I just have a feeling that Marc isn't to blame, that something strange is happening to him, and he can't help himself. Maybe he needs me very badly right now."

"What's happened to him isn't so strange," Jewel pronounced. "It's just that lousy male chemistry at work. The devils all get that way sooner or later. Men are just a bunch of brutes, all of them. If there's anything mysterious about all this it's only how you manage to feel so damned charitable about it."

Albeit unwittingly on this occasion, Jewel, in all her history of premeditated lies, had never spoken a greater

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untruth. There was something far more mysterious going on than just Julie's feeling of charity. It wanted only a trip to the basement to be discovered.

The thing that was taking place in the subterranean regions of the house was stranger than either truth or fiction and twice as paralyzing.

THE FACT of the matter was that George had finally arrived on earth. Starting logically at the beginning, with the first principle of haunting as set down in the Guide, George had descended to the place of his earthly part's untimely demise. Here, according to the rules, there were certain procedures of investigation to be followed; but George was far too excited with his sudden condition of release to be bothered with those. Like a giddy school girl with her first party dress, he could hardly wait to try on his ectoplasm. Even in this, however, there were difficulties involved.

Unfortunately, as George saw it, the process of ectoplasmic materialization depended largely upon the concentration of the entity involved; first he had to thoroughly picture in his mind the earthly form that he was to assume, and then, from that mental image, shape his earthly manifestation. The trouble was that George's powers of concentration had never been anything to brag about.

George's observance of the human form had always been extremely sketchy at best. Faced with the problem of shaping such a form for himself, he was somewhat at a loss. Pressing his memory to the limit he could only recall that there were such things as arms, legs, head and torsos, but the exact number and arrangement of these appointments completely escaped him. Try as he would to think, nothing very clear came to mind. Finally, in desperation, he decided just to give it the old trial-and-error and make it up as he went along. He might have done better to find himself an anatomy chart.

George decided on an arm and a hand to begin with; they seemed a rather utilitarian item to have in the event that you wanted to go around picking things up. He gave his thoughts over to that appendage.

The process worked with surprising facility. In the very next moment an arm, neatly tapering off to a hand, promptly appeared, balanced on the elbow, on the basement floor. George looked at it and felt a thrill of pride at the accomplishment; it didn't matter that the thing was rather starkly at loose ends with itself.

Glowing with the success of his first venture, George decided on a head as the subject of his next efforts. Without a moment's hesitation, but several feet above the arm, a head appeared in thin air, bearing a duplicate face to the one of Marc Pillsworth. It was wonderfully lifelike. It turned, looked down at the arm, and frowned.

Now George wasn't so sure; somehow things didn't seem to be shaping up quite as he'd expected. He shrugged. Probably matters would be improved when everything was more connected together. He thought for a moment and remembered the matter of legs.

A moment later a leg and accompanying foot popped into being, but oddly it appeared in a position near the head, a bit to one side with the foot leading off rakishly toward the ceiling.

The head turned and regarded this phenomenon with worried interest. Definitely, things weren't balancing out at all well. But what was there to do but to go on with it now that it had gotten this far? And then the head

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smiled; George had remembered. There should be two arms and two legs in place of just one. In the grisly moment that followed, the arm on the floor was joined by a mate, as was the leg hovering in the air by the head.

The head peered with unwarranted pride from between the floating legs and smiled on its accomplishments. Now George felt he was really getting somewhere. There remained only the torso to be materialized. George thought about this and wished it into being.

THE PICTURE that followed was lurching madness. Somehow a body had appeared, balanced upside down on its elbows, in the very center of the basement floor. And if that wasn't enough, the head had apparently been severed and placed, for the sake of pure frightfulness, between the knees.

George, now that the body was complete, recognized the error at once. With a blush, he dissolved the head from between the knees and concentrated it down towards the shoulders. The scene instantly became more sane. Now there was a complete and perfectly formed man standing on his elbows in the center of the basement. For a moment he remained rigidly upright, then he wavered and fell flat on his back.

George gazed elatedly down his long length for a moment, then laughed and sat up. Of course! Now everything was just as it should be. He didn't know how he had come to be clothed, and he had no idea that he was wearing an exact duplicate of the suit Marc was wearing, but he considered himself to be a rather natty specimen. All in all, George couldn't have been more pleased. He got to his feet, saluted his new existence with a rather expertly executed jig step, and looked about...

After a casual search of the basement, just to make sure that the corpse of Marc Pillsworth was no longer kicking around anywhere, George directed his attention to the wine bins. If he noticed the floating debris on the ceiling he didn't know that it constituted a condition that was in any way unnatural. He selected a bottle from one of the shelves, opened it, and took a swallow. Immediately, he was overcome with a feeling of enormous disappointment; this couldn't possibly be that whiskey stuff that mortals seemed to miss so much in the upper world. Whiskey, according to report, could cause a poor man to be rich, a peasant to be king. Certainly this drab liquid was far too pallid for that kind of magic. George replaced the bottle and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. He glanced around at the stairs across from the bins and went over to investigate.

He stopped at the foot of the steps and listened. Distantly, there were voices above—and, therefore, mortals. George decided that now was as good as any other time to plunge into things; perhaps he could pick up a few pointers. He started up the steps, then stopped thoughtfully.

Perhaps it would be better not to burst in upon these mortals in a state of complete materialization; it might be just a bit too much for them. Maybe it would be better to break the news of his arrival gradually, let them just suspect for awhile and give himself time to grow on them. That was the ticket; he was sure that even the High Council couldn't find anything wrong with that idea.

George held one foot out before him and dissolved it. Then taking the next step, he repeated the process with the other foot.

Causing himself to disappear a bit at a time he rose slowly toward the

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world of the mortals...

"THERE'S no use hiding in your handkerchief," May Springer said. "The sooner you talk to your lawyer, the sooner you'll stop crying."

Julie looked up uncertainly. "Maybe you're right," she said. "But I don't know. Oh, I don't know anything!"

"What you need," Jewel said emphatically, "is a drink to give you courage. We all do." She turned to May. "Run out to the bar, pet, and bring us a bottle. This damned tea isn't doing any of us any good."

May, accustomed to acting on Jewel's command, followed instructions. She left the room in the direction of the study and in a moment was back with a bottle and three glasses.

"That's the stuff," Jewel said heartily. "Clear out those tea things and put 'er down. I'll pour."

With everything arranged to her satisfaction, Jewel filled the glasses with a quick and lavish hand. She handed brimming glasses to May and Julie, then raised her own glass to propose a toast.

"To divorce!" she boomed. "And the damnation of husbands!"

Julie raised her glass, but only half-heartedly. Then without even tasting the drink, she placed it on the table in front of her.

"There's nothing like whiskey to open the mind and the pores so that the poison can get out," Jewel announced loudly. "It's wonderful stuff."

It was just at this moment that the invisible George drifted expectantly into the room. He stopped short and pricked up his ears. Whiskey! The very thing he was looking for, and here were mortals fairly wallowing in the stuff. He observed the ladies with an eye mainly to the glasses in their hands. Then he noticed Julie's glass, languishing on the table. It was a circumstance that plainly wanted mending. George drifted quickly forward.

For a moment George only stood regarding the drink covetously. Then he turned to observe the ladies. Since this was to be his first manifestation before an audience he felt he should make the most of the materials at hand. Considering the ladies in turn, he decided that he disliked Jewel Drummer the most. He waited carefully until that turret-faced matron was looking in his direction, then lifted the glass with a broad flourish. Even to George the effect of the drink suddenly flying from the table and into the air seemed rather arresting.

To Jewel the effect was downright terrifying. Her glass raised to her lips, she suddenly started, misdirected her aim and poured the entire drink into her yawning bodice. With horrified reflex she jolted out of her chair and hurled the glass from her. As the glass crashed against the opposite wall, George tossed off his drink and replaced the glass on the table.

In unison, Julie and May turned puzzled eyes on the palpitating Jewel.

"The glass!" Jewel blurted in tones of terror. "The glass!" Then suddenly she gulped and sat down again as the bottle, like the glass, leaped lightly from the table, upended itself over the glass, filled it, then replaced itself.

"The bottle!" Jewel boomed.

"She wants the bottle," May told Julie. "God, what a thirst that woman's got! Did you see her knock off that drink? And now she's yelling for the bottle. She's fairly lusting for the stuff. Give her the bottle, dear, before she starts breaking the furniture."

Julie quickly snatched up the bottle from the table and held it out to Jewel.

"Here, dear," she said, "take it."

Jewel pressed herself frightenedly

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against the back of her seat.

"Take it easy!" she screamed. "Don't bring it near me!"

"She fights the stuff all the time," May told Julie confidentially. "Of course I've never really been sure before, but I've suspected all along."

"I must cling to my reason," Jewel babbled desperately to herself. "I mustn't give way!"

"What's that, dear?" May asked soothingly.

"Maybe we should pretend nothing's happened," Julie suggested anxiously. "You know, just go on talking and pay no attention to her."

"It might help," May agreed.

FOR A MOMENT the two ladies engaged in frenzied and meaningless conversation, cautiously watching Jewel from the corners of their eyes. Jewel, her eyes riveted with terrible fascination on the table, seemed to have gone into a trance.

In the meantime, George, for his part, was suffering the pangs of disappointment. To all intents and purposes, except for a certain feeling of inner warmth, he was feeling much the same as always. The liquor had failed to perform the miracle he had expected. But perhaps that was only because he hadn't had enough. Once more he reached out toward the glass and lifted it from the table.

With a final bellow of madness Jewel heaved her bulk from the chair and bolted from the room.

"God in heaven!" she roared from the hallway. "Let me out of here!"

May rose unhurriedly. "I guess the struggle was too much for her," she said mildly. "You just stay where you are, dear. I'll take her home. Poor Jewel. She'll need someone to talk to, to confide in, and I'm her best friend." Then in an undertone: "I've always thought she belonged in an institution anyway. I'll call you later."

When they had gone, Julie relinquished her spirit to the quiet atmosphere of the room. She had worried and cried, she felt, until she hadn't any emotion left in her. Now she only felt numb. Then she started slightly as a muffled gurgling sound briefly broke the quiet. She glanced around quickly, but there was nothing. Then the doorbell rang. She turned her attention toward the hallway as Marie passed through to answer the door. After a moment the maid returned to the living room.

"There are a couple of gentlemen," she reported. "They say they're from the government and must see you."

Julie was pensive for a moment; she couldn't imagine why anyone from the government should want an interview with her. She shrugged.

"All right, Marie," she said. Then she glanced at the bottle and the glasses on the table; not quite the proper fittings for a chat with the government. "I'll see them in the study."

She rose and started from the room. Then suddenly she heard a small scraping noise and turned back quickly. For a moment she stood still, staring at the table. Could the bottle actually have been moving just as she turned around? But of course that was silly.

Just nerves, she told herself, and continued into the hallway.

After introductions, Julie led the men to the study, gave them seats and took a place opposite them. She would have known they were from the government even if she hadn't been told; with that careful, unrevealing look, they only needed an official stamp of certification on their foreheads.

"Is there something I can do for you?" she asked.

"Well, we're not exactly sure," one of the men said. "However, we have

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reason to believe you can." He cleared his throat. "To get directly to the point, we are interested in an explosion which we believe took place on these premises last night."

"Oh, dear!" Julie said. "Have the neighbors complained?"

"No, Mrs. Pillsworth, nothing like that. You see, we have mechanical means of knowing about explosions. There is a device in existence which records the precise time, location, magnitude and nature of even the slightest explosion anywhere on the Earth's surface. One was recorded here last night. The nature, however, was undetermined and that's why we decided to investigate."

Julie nodded. She told them of Marc's basement laboratory and his experiments to make heavy substances lighter than air. She explained about the explosion.

"The experiment was a complete failure, I guess," she concluded.

"I see," the man said. "Would you mind, though, if we took a look around in the basement anyway?"

"No, I don't mind," Julie said. "But judging from what I saw down there last night you won't find anything but a lot of rubble."

"Of course," the man said. "But we can't take a chance on a possible new type of explosive. It might be of military interest. Just in case, Mrs. Pillsworth, do you know where your husband kept his notes on the experiment?"

Julie thought for a moment. "In a little black book, I believe," she said. "He just left it lying around loose down there."

The man nodded and got up. "We'll have the maid show us where it is," he said. "Thank you very much."

WHEN THEY were gone, Julie leaned back in her chair and closed her eyes. She was so weary, just from talking to people. Then she sat up quickly. She could have sworn she'd heard something out in the hall, a furtive noise, as though someone had cautiously let himself in the front door. She got up and went to the doorway of the study.

"Marc!" she called, then suddenly froze where she was.

Never had she seen two uglier customers than the ones that were now cowering before her in the shadows of the hallway. Two very dark little men with gross black beards, thick-lensed glasses and derby hats. They seemed to be exact and very dreadful duplicates of each other, as though the same awful mistake had happened twice. Their eyes shifted nervously before Julie's horrified gaze. They looked precisely like a pair of spies.

"Who are you two?" Julie asked uneasily. "What are you doing here?"

The two shifted uncomfortably, glanced at each other. Finally the one closest to Julie spoke.

"I'm Gerald Blemish," he said, and nodded toward the other. "This is my twin brother, Cecil. Of course those names are entirely fictitious, but we haven't used our real ones for so long we've forgotten them. Then, on the other hand, maybe those are our real names only we just don't know it. We came with the men from the government."

"Oh," Julie said, relieved. "You're with the government too."

"Oh, no," Gerald Blemish said. "Heavens no. We just followed them in. We're spies."

"Spies?" Julie said incredulously. "Oh, dear! With government men right in the house?"

"Oh, we followed them everywhere," the brother called Cecil said. "We find things out faster that way."

"I can see where you would," Julie

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said. "Haven't they ever caught you?"

"Oh, yes. They catch us all the time. That's one reason they like to have us around; we're handy in case they want to arrest someone and don't know who to arrest." He glanced at his brother and sniggered noisily. "They think we're harmless."

"We've been arrested in so many shake-ups," Gerald offered, "we're known as the Double Malts to some people. We photograph very well in the newsreels. You know, being taken into custody with our hats over our faces. That's why we wear hats, just for pictures."

"Oh, yes," Cecil put in. "As a matter of fact, we used to be in the movies professionally. We played spies exclusively. Because we look so awful. In fact that's how we got started as spies. After seeing us as spies on the screen all the time, everyone got to believe we really were spies. No one would come near us."

Gerald nodded. "When we went to call on anyone, people refused to answer the door."

"It sort of depressed us at first," Cecil said. "And then, on top of that, the movies stopped using us. The vogue in spies turned to beautiful women. They said we were old hat. That put us out of work. But there wasn't anything else we knew how to do. No one would believe we weren't spies so we just had to go on being them."

"I see," Julie said, feeling that she had wandered into a world of complete madness. "What country do you spy for?"

The brothers glanced quickly at each other, then lowered their eyes to the floor. "That's just the trouble," Gerald said in saddened tones. "We don't work for anyone. We're unsponsored. No country will hire us because we look so much like spies. Other spies refuse to be seen with us."

"I don't wonder," Julie said. "With faces like yours. I wouldn't want to be seen with you, and I'm not even a spy."

THE DREADFUL brothers looked up with unexpected happiness. They smiled on Julie crookedly from the corners of their mouths.

"Oh, I'm so glad you said that," Cecil said. "We were afraid we were beginning to lose our looks. Do you think we're really vile? You're not just saying that?"

"I think you're perfectly horrible," Julie said with a feeling of delusion. "And I mean every word of it."

"You're wonderful to say that," Cecil drooled unattractively. He reached inside his coat and drew out a soiled piece of paper. "Would you like the secret to the atom bomb? I know it's kind of old stuff, but maybe you'd get a kick out of just having it to show your friends. We've had it for years now, only no one would take it from us; they wouldn't believe it was real. Take it as a token of our appreciation."

Julie backed sharply away. "No, thank you."

"We've stolen all kinds of plans and formulas and things," Cecil said. "Even secret recipes. But everyone acts like you do; they won't let us give them a thing. Our room is filled with secret papers. We could overthrow any government in the world just like that, if someone would just take us seriously."

"That's too bad," Julie said.

"The trouble is we've got no reputation; we've never done anything terrible enough to get a break."

"Yeah," Gerald slurred. "That's the trouble. But we'll make it yet. We'll do something perfectly monstrous one of these days and then we'll be in. We've got ambition and talent."

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"I'm sure you have," Julie said.

"You're very nice to encourage us like this," Cecil said. "And we won't let you down either. We're very good at our trade. Would you like to see us skulk?"

"Skulk?" Julie said. "How do you mean?"

"Oh, just skulk. You know, slither and sneak around and things like that." He turned to Gerald. "Let's show her, huh?"

"All right!" Gerald said. "I'm ready."

"Now wait....!" Julie began, but before she could say anything more the two had disappeared into the shadows, and suddenly the hallway and the room behind her were filled with strange furtive scurrying sounds. As she turned to look behind her in the study, she saw one of the frightful brothers dart soundlessly from beneath the desk and disappear behind the drapes at the window. The other peered at her momentarily from behind a chair. They moved around the room with a rapidity and stealth that was maddening. They were everywhere.

"Stop that!" Julie cried. "For heavens sake, stop it!"

Instantly the two brothers returned before her, grinning breathlessly.

"Isn't it sinister?" Cecil asked. "Doesn't it just make your spine crawl?"

"I think mine has already crawled," Julie said. "I wouldn't be surprised to see it scuttling out the door under its own power at this very moment."

"We could skulk all day and never get tired." He held out a sheaf of papers. "I got these out of the desk."

Julie took the papers timidly. "Don't you think you ought to spy on the gentlemen down in the basement now?" she suggested. "They're probably wondering what's keeping you."

"That's right," Gerald said. "Well, we'll sneak along now. It's too bad we haven't more time. We'd show you how we lurk. Everyone says we're the best lurkers in the business."

AND SUDDENLY the two were gone, faded into the shadows. Shaking her head, Julie turned back to the study to replace the papers in the desk. Then she stopped as a sharp scream of terror came from the kitchen; the awful brothers had evidently discovered Marie.

Julie was just returning from the desk when the telephone rang. Without waiting for Marie, who was probably in no condition to talk at the moment anyway, she continued to the hallway and answered it herself.

"Mrs. Pillsworth?" a male voice inquired heavily. "This is the police."

"Police?" Julie said. Her first thought turned instantly toward Marc. "My husband! Has something happened to Marc?"

"I'll say, lady," the voice replied. "He's been arrested."

"Arrested? What for?"

"Well, I don't know how to tell you, lady. It sounds silly, and you ain't going to believe it, but he was run in for attacking a statue."

"Attacking a statue!"

"That's what the description says. That an' a lot more that I can't repeat on the telephone. It seems like him and this little redheaded hellcat...."

"Oh!" Julie broke in frigidly. "So she's mixed up in it, is she!"

Then suddenly the look of anger faded from Julie's face and became one of pure astonishment. As she had been talking, her attention had been drawn to the living room doorway by a movement there. Now, her eyes wide, she stared at a bottle suspended in thin air. Even as she watched, it moved a bit, tilted inquisitively, almost as though it were eavesdropping.

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Julie closed her eyes tightly and turned away. She had to get a grip on herself before her nerves gave way completely. She tightened her hold on the telephone.

"You tell my husband," she said, "that he can rot in jail for all I care. I'm going to Reno."

She hung up, passed a trembling hand over her forehead. For a long moment she stood perfectly still. Then, slowly, she turned and forced herself to look at the doorway. As she stared, her face draining white, the bottle tilted smartly and emptied the slight remains of its contents into thin air. There was a moment of electric silence, then the hallway resounded from end to end with the rumblings of an unrestrained burp.

With a smothered cry, Julie sank limply to the floor...

CHAPTER VI

"OH, MY WORD!" the judge said, lifting haunted eyes from the report. "Do you mean this Pillsworth fellow actually did all that to a statue? Before witnesses? It fairly makes my hair stand on end."

"He did that and more," the prosecuting attorney said. "Pillsworth is no ordinary man."

"Either that," the judge said, "or that statue is no ordinary statue. Where is this fellow? I can hardly wait to get a look at him."

"No, Your Honor," the attorney said. "I didn't mean that. Actually, nothing happened to the statue."

"Put up a good fight, did she? Good for her."

"What I mean to say," the attorney went on patiently, "is that the statue is perfectly all right."

"Stout girl," the judge nodded. "I give that statue real credit. There aren't many women, stone or otherwise, who could go through a seige like that and come out on the right side of things. That statue has got guts. If she were here now it would give me great pleasure to shake that statue's hand."

The attorney cleared his throat dryly. "Can't we drop the statue, Your Honor?" he suggested.

"After everything else she's been through!" the judge exclaimed. He narrowed his eyes indignantly on the attorney. "Really, sir, do you think that's the human thing to do?"

"I don't mean drop her literally," the attorney protested. "I mean couldn't we just sort of lay her aside for a bit? What I'm getting at is..."

"I know perfectly well what you're getting at," the judge broke in hotly. "You can just forget it. I'm beginning to wonder if you're any better than this Pillsworth fellow."

"That's what I wanted to tell you about," the attorney said quickly. "Pillsworth claims he had to grab hold of the statue to keep from floating away into space. He says he's lighter than air."

"My word!" the judge said, thoroughly scandalized. "Does he really? I'm surprised he has the nerve to try to pull a thing like that in court. And the girl? What about her? I understand she was swimming around without any clothes on."

"Well, actually, she had on a sort of shift affair. But it looked like she was naked when she was wet. At best, she's a wild citizen. Seems to regard this whole affair as a sort of picnic. I understand she broke out of her cell last night."

"Oh, dear!" the judge said. "I hope it doesn't leak out. How did she manage it?"

"No one knows," the attorney said. "The girl won't tell. The door was still locked and everything was in or-

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der. When they found her this morning she was romping around in the wardrobe and had rigged herself out in a dress from one of those burlesque strippers who were brought in."

"A pretty taste in clothes, eh?"

The attorney nodded. "When the burlesque girl saw her in it, she told her to keep it; said she looked so much better in it than she did herself, she was throwing in the sponge."

"Sponge?" the judge said. "Throwing it in where? Do you mean this stripper threw a sponge at her?"

"I was speaking figuratively," the attorney said patiently.

"I understand that," the judge said with an air of testiness. "You have to speak figuratively when you're going on like this about strippers and such." He laughed foolishly. "I get it; I'm not so old. But about this sponge, was it wet or dry when the girl threw it?"

"I don't know," the attorney said desperately trying to cling to some small thread of logic in the conversation. "It wasn't mentioned when I heard about it."

"Well, I don't suppose it really matters," the judge said. "A sponge doesn't constitute a deadly weapon either way."

JUST AT that moment one of the doors across the room opened and Toffee appeared before the court. She was followed at a safe distance by an extremely harrassed-looking police matron. The redhead was a study in glitter and pink flesh. Three sequined butterflies garishly highlighted the strategic portions of her anatomy without running any grave danger of obscuring them entirely. A vaporish material dusted with spangles provided a skirt of sorts. It was a dress that fairly begged for blue lights, slow-rhythmed music and unrestrained whistles. Toffee presented herself to the court with a spectacular flourish, then turned peevishly to the matron.

"You make another grab at me with those horny talons of yours," she warned, "and I'll flatten you down even with your arch supports."

The matron backed away, affrighted. "Then you keep your hands off those zippers," she said. "They don't allow monkeyshines in the courtroom. And just you wait till the judge hears about you breaking out of your cell."

Toffee smiled enigmatically. She knew the matron would be deviled with that mystery for the rest of her days. And even if the wretched woman ever discovered the truth, she'd never believe it, though the explanation was simple enough. Being a product of Marc's consciousness, Toffee naturally could not exist when he was asleep. So, as she had promised, when Marc had finally fallen asleep, Toffee had disappeared from her cell to return to the valley of Marc's mind. However, when Marc awoke in the morning, she had instantly reappeared. She had simply chosen to rematerialize in the wardrobe rather than her cell.

To Toffee's mind there was really nothing so terribly mysterious about that. Choosing to ignore the matron altogether, she turned her attention to the judge. She waved a hand to the august person of the bench and started forward.

"Here, you...!" the matron began.

Toffee swung around menacingly. "Stand your ground, Bertha," she said. "You may wind up wearing those false teeth of yours as a necklace." She turned back to the judge and smiled. "Well, here we are," she greeted airily, "wild-eyed and bushy-tailed!"

The judge made an indignant choking sound. "Now, look here...!" he said.

"I am looking there," Toffee said.

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"And it's a great disappointment to me."

"Young lady!" the judge roared. "Do you want to be charged with contempt of court?"

"Maybe I'd better warn you, judge," Toffee said coolly. "Don't bully me; I may forget myself and pull a zipper. That would crab your act something awful. Besides, if you charged me for all the contempt I've got for this court there wouldn't be enough money to pay the bill."

"Well!" the judge snorted. "Of all the....!"

"You're turning purple, son," Toffee observed mildly. "It's not half becoming, either."

The court audience became tensely hushed as the judge reared back in his seat and opened his mouth. But the eruption failed to come.

Just at that moment the door at the far end of the room opened and Marc, accompanied by a guard, stepped into view. His progress to a position before the bench was not marked with any noticeable tendency toward levitation. Toffee, the judge, the court spectators regarded him with undisguised interest. Marc directed his gaze self-consciously toward his toes.

ONLY THAT morning Marc had made a remarkable discovery; that food tempered his buoyancy and made it possible for him to remain secure to the floor without clutching to anything for anchorage. Whether this was a permanent condition or not, he didn't know, but still it had been a relief to know that he would be able to make his way before the court without appearing on the ceiling.

However, though mightily relieved, Marc was not as elated at this development as he might have been; there were other things to plague him. Julie's message that she was going to Reno, for instance. And the court's probable decision; they were bound to conclude that he was either a criminal or insane or both before they were through with him. He felt that he might just as well drift off into eternity and have it over with as spend the rest of his life locked up, separated from Julie. He raised his head and glanced apprehensively at the court audience.

Julie wasn't there. But he hadn't really expected that she would be. However, a number of people involved in the affair at the Wynant were in attendance, including the manager and the clerk. Also, there were a pair of the most evil-looking male twins Marc had ever set eyes on. Heavily bearded, wearing thick-lensed glasses, they looked to him like nothing so much as a pair of those spies you used to see in movies. Marc shuddered and turned back to the judge, which was no improvement over the unattractive twins. The judge lifted his gavel.

"The court is now in session!" he thundered.

"And high time, too!" Toffee sang out in reproving agreement.

The judge leaned on the gavel and brought it down solidly on his own hand.

"Damnation!" he bellowed.

"Such low talk for such high places," Toffee commented dryly, turning to Marc.

Marc glanced down at her brief costume and a look of pain assailed his already troubled features.

"Be quiet," he said, almost pleadingly.

"Yes!" the judge said, nursing his hand. "You be quiet!" Then he turned and gazed malevolently at the gathering in general. "The air of insanity which has crept into this court will dissipate itself instantly or I'll clear the hall. I'll clear out the whole kit

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and kaboodle of you, even the defendants." He turned back to Toffee. "I may clear out the defendants anyway."

The court settled into a state of heavy quiet, and though the air of madness which the judge had spoken of with such great passion had abated, there was the feeling that it was only holding itself in abeyance, that it might reassert itself at any moment with a vengeance. The judge cleared his throat and settled his glasses on his nose.

"Your Honor..." the prosecution began.

"Shut up!" the judge snapped peevishly. "I want no lengthy speeches from you. This case is plain enough without any highfalutin' verbage from any legal eagles."

The judge elaborated, going on at some length about the degree and quality of the silence he wished from all concerned. No one noticed that the door to the courtroom had quietly opened, permitted the passage of a quantity of what appeared to be merely fresh air, then gently closed again.

IT HAD BEEN a cruel night for George; the ways of earthly civilization had dealt with him without temperance or humanity. The poor ghost, having eavesdropped on Julie's telephone conversation, had begun to have a horrible suspicion that Marc Pillsworth was still alive and that he, George, was on earth under false pretenses. George had been distressed at this; here was a set of circumstances that the High Council wouldn't even begin to approve.

Gathering that the mortal in question was in the hands of the police, George had finally....and with all the best intentions in the world....decided to check this appalling piece of information for himself on the bare hope that there might have been some mistake.

Placing himself, rather invisibly of course, in the hands of the rapid transit system, George had received the ride of a lifetime. He had covered the length and breadth of the city several times over without ever arriving at his destination. It was all too much for George's powers of comprehension. He had been shoved, stepped on, pushed and sat on by humans almost beyond the limits of his endurance. Now, bruised and beaten, he had finally arrived at the place he sought. He gazed on the courtroom without enthusiasm, sighted Marc and drifted disconsolately forward, his hopes withering as he moved.

"Of course," the judge was saying, "this case, on the face of things, is so silly I blush to be trying it in this court. Actually, it belongs in an asylum." He fixed Marc with a cold stare. "Do you still contend, Pillsworth, that you were clinging to that statue solely for reasons of security? In other words, do you persist in the mad delusion that you were floating through space?"

"Yes, Your Honor," Marc said earnestly. "You see, I have been engaged in an experiment...."

"Enough!" the judge snorted. "Don't go on about it. It's too disgusting." With a forefinger he pressed his glasses to the bridge of his nose. "That settles it. The only thing for you to do, Pillsworth, is to prove your point to the court. In other words, demonstrate that you really are.... uh....buoyant. Briefly, either you float, here and now, for the court or you go to the pokey and wait for a mental examination. And let me warn you against any mechanical devices."

"But, Your Honor!" Marc protested. "Only this morning I discovered that...."

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"Float!" the judge demanded. "Go on. Float!"

An expectant quiet ensued as Marc stood miserably before the bench. Several photographers moved quietly forward, shifting fresh bulbs into their cameras. Toffee turned to Marc anxiously.

"Go on!" she hissed. "Show the old goat!"

Marc looked at her unhappily. "I can't!" he whispered.

During this interval, looking remarkably haunted for a ghost, George arrived at a position between Marc and Toffee. He gazed on Marc's face and frowned; there was no question about it, his mortal part had played him a foul trick; Marc was still alive. George was undecided as to how to meet the situation. His inclination was to stick around just for revenge, but there was the warning from the Council. Then, too, there was the possibility that Marc might tick off at any moment; after all, living in this earth world was an extremely perilous business from all that George had seen of it. In that case, everything would be all right. Weighing the pros and cons of the matter. George turned to regard Toffee for the first time. Instantly his mood brightened.

There was hardly anything that George could see about Toffee that he didn't like, and he could see virtually everything. Particularly, he admired her taste in clothes. Clearly, here was a girl who had a bit of flair and imagination. However, the small piece of metal sticking out untidily at the waist offended George's sense of perfection. That didn't belong there, he was sure of it. As George reached out to pluck away the offending blemish he had no idea that with the mere flick of a finger he was about to touch off a roaring panic.

IN THE moment that followed there was a small zipping sound which was instantly followed by a startled gasp, as Toffee, to the electrification of all present, suddenly stood before the court bereft of two of her most valuable butterflies and all of her skirt. There was a bit of silence after that, followed by a sudden flash of a camera, a sprinkling of half-hysterical applause, and one small scream.

The judge, starting from his chair to lean across the bench for a better view of the performance, reverted to his former shade of purple. His face bloated with rage, he was rendered incapable of anything more coherent than a furious sputter. Amazingly, Toffee seemed to share the judge's feelings in the matter. She whirled on Marc with eyes that glittered.

"Of all the shabby stunts!" she stormed. "Trying to stall for time by making a show out of me! You lousy sensationalist!"

"What...?" Marc began innocently.

But it was too late. Already Toffee had doubled her fist and wound up for the pitch. The next thing Marc knew he had been dealt with harshly in the vicinity of his nose. He lost his footing and sailed backwards.

Toffee watched the results of her handiwork with satisfaction. However she was somewhat astonished at how heavy Marc had been in the felling. The truth of the matter, though, was that she had knocked down not one Marc Pillsworth but two. George, caught at the side of the head by Toffee's elbow staggered backwards, tripped over a chair, and fell sprawling on his back.

Marc landed heavily on the floor, skidded crazily out of sight under the table, struck his head smartly against a leg and lay inert. In the same second, the matron reached a restraining

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hand toward Toffee, then started back with a cry of fright; the girl had suddenly vanished. S i m u l t a n e o u s l y, George, in a fit of confusion and surprise, fully and completely materialized himself.

All this happened in the flick of an eyelash.

As far as the court was concerned the incident was fairly simple: Toffee had knocked Marc to the floor, then fled the room. All eyes turned toward George under the misapprehension that he was Marc.

The judge beat out a deafening thunder with his gavel.

"Order!" he screamed. "Order!"

The court quieted. The matron ran forward to the bench.

"She's gone!" the harried woman cried. "She just disappeared!"

"Good!" the judge said. "And for heaven's sake don't go looking for her. I hope I never set eyes on that girl as long as I live." He turned to look evilly at George. "Get to your feet," he commanded.

George looked up at the judge and blanched; for a moment he was afraid he'd been recalled to the chambers of the High Council. He got quickly to his feet.

"All right now," the judge said with deadly steadiness. "Float!"

"Float?" George asked.

"Yes, of course, float," the judge snorted. "That's what we're all waiting for, isn't it? Are you going to float or aren't you?"

George shrugged. There was certainly no accounting for the tastes of these mortals. He couldn't imagine why this man was so insanely anxious to see him float; it seemed to mean the world and all to the poor devil. However, George supposed it would be best to humor him. He settled himself squarely on his feet, closed his eyes, and concentrated. Slowly he began to levitate from the courtroom floor.

When he had risen to a height of about eight feet, he stopped, opened his eyes, and looked down. A sea of widened eyes and opened mouths gaped up at him. An excited murmur went through the court. The judge rose up out of his seat like a great gulping porpoise, then fell back heavily.

"Lord love a lobster!" he gasped.

GEORGE gazed on these reactions with amazed satisfaction. Obviously these mortals were pathetically easy to please; if a simple demonstration of levitation could cause this much concern, just think how they'd react to some of his other accomplishments! The ham bone popped out in George's restrained soul like an internal rash.

With a small formal bow, first fore, than aft, the self-dazzled spook sat down with a flourish, placed his hand comfortably behind his neck, and stretched out with suspenseful deliberation. Then, dangling one foot lazily in space, he dissolved his head.

As a low moan issued through the courtroom, one of the photographers nearest this dreadful scene turned to another of his kind.

"You know, Harry," he said in a controlled voice, "I've been thinking. You and me, we've been in this racket an awful long time now."

"Yeah," said Harry. "An awful long time."

"Yeah. Maybe too long. It's no kind of a life for a man with any kind of sensitivity, you know. It's liable to take a bad effect on a guy after a while."

"I know what you mean," Harry said thoughtfully. "You get around too much, see too many screwy things. It might begin to give you a sort of distorted view like."

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"Sure. It could even get so bad you could get kind of unbalanced. Maybe it would start with you seein' things that aren't real."

"Uh-huh," Harry nodded. "Maybe like guys floatin' around in the air without they've got their heads on. Or something like that. Not that I've ever seen no such thing, mind you."

"Of course not. Who would see a crazy thing like that unless it was somebody goin' bugs or somethin'?" The photographer laughed falsely. "It's funny to think a thing like that could happen to a guy."

"Yeah," Harry said. "It's a real laugh. What say we get the hell out of here?"

"You bet! Let's run like the devil!"

Together, the men dropped their cameras to the floor, turned, and ran as fast as they could out of the court room.

Meanwhile, a new groan of horrified amazement had gone through the room. George, in an effort to demonstrate to his audience the very last measure of his paralyzing talent, had introduced a new and even more arresting wrinkle to his performance. Alternately dematerializing and rematerializing in rapid succession, he was blinking on and off like a neon sign.

The judge took one look at this nerve-twisting innovation and rallied to a final effort. He reached for his gavel and brought it down feebly on the bench.

"Dismissed!" he whizzed. "Dismissed! I dismiss everything. For the love of Hannah, *dismissed!*"

Suddenly the court broke into pandemonium. The traffic to the doors was disordered and chaotic as the members of the audience trampled each other to be out of the place. In front of the bench George perceived regretfully that he had lost his audience, dissolved himself for one last time and sank slowly down to the floor.

Beneath the table, Marc roused himself and sat up to rub his head. As he did so, Toffee instantly appeared beside him.

"What happened?" he asked vaguely.

"How should I know?" Toffee asked tartly. "Just when things were getting interesting you passed out and dissolved me." She glanced from beneath the table. "Now it's all over."

She crawled out from beneath the table and gathered the scraps of her costume which had remained abandoned on the floor. As she quickly zipped everything into place, she looked around.

"The judge went away without even saying goodbye," she said injuredly.

CHAPTER VII

MARC AND Toffee swung quickly out of the courtroom and started down the corridor. They were not entirely certain that they were officially allowed this break from the smothering embrace of the law, but since it was a love that was totally unrequited they felt perfectly justified in nipping it off as cleanly and quickly as possible. Besides, neither was in a mood to ask questions.

Marc frowned deeply. The future, in view of past events, was not reassuring. He wondered what night it was that he had lain awake and felt a happy anticipation at strange and wonderful things about to happen. It didn't seem possible that it could have been only night before last; it must have been years and years ago in view of all that had happened. Certainly, in a most disturbing way, the strange and wonderful things had come to pass, but the feeling of happy antici-

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George threw the courtroom into an uproar as he suddenly dematerialized his head . . .

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pation had been shot to hell in its very beginnings.

How could things possibly have gotten themselves into so incomprehensible a snarl in just the space of a few short hours? Only a day and a night had passed and now, here he was with a divorce, an irresponsible redhead, a criminal record and several volumes of unfavorable publicity on his hands. And to top it all off, though he was subject to the laws of gravity at the moment, he had taken to floating about in the air like a demented balloon. Also, he had the forbidding feeling that he might revert to a condition of buoyancy at any given moment.

Marc sighed heavily and cursed the day he conceived the idea of the basement laboratory. If there was any small comfort remaining to him at all it came only from a patently comfortless cliche: things couldn't possibly get any worse. He didn't see the courtroom door swing mysteriously open behind him, waver for a moment, then swing shut again.

Neither did Marc see the horrible Blemish twins following behind him and Toffee in the corridor shadows. His attention, instead, had been drawn to the two men in double breasted suits who were shoving their way toward him through the crowd. Though Marc was certain that the two, regardless of what their business might be, could be the bearers of only bad tidings, he hadn't the will left in him to try to avoid them. One more worry, added to the multitude he already had, would hardly be noticed. Taking Toffee's hand, he stopped and waited resignedly for the two to catch up to them.

"Mr. Pillsworth?" the first man nodded.

"Could there be any doubt?" Toffee said dully.

The man glanced at Toffee, startled a little at her costume, then returned his gaze firmly and resolutely to Marc.

"We are with the Federal Government," he said. He nodded toward the courtroom from which Marc and Toffee had just departed. "I'm sorry we didn't get here sooner; we could have saved you all that trouble."

"Now it's the Feds," Toffee murmured. "More cops....more courtrooms....more judges....more questions....wurra, wurra."

No one paid any attention.

"We've been to your home, Mr. Pillsworth," the man went on. "We've gone over your laboratory very thoroughly, and it's our opinion that you've turned up something that could be of great interest to the government. In a military way. Your wife explained to us that your intention was to facilitate construction, and I suppose, in a way, you've succeeded. However, in the process, you've also discovered an explosive of most extraordinary properties."

"How was Julie when you saw her?" Marc asked.

"Mrs. Pillsworth was most cooperative," the man said, acknowledging the interruption. "However, she was quite busy while we were there. I gathered she was closing up the house, taking a trip somewhere."

"Did she say when she was leaving?" Marc asked anxiously.

"I believe she said this evening," the man said. "I supposed you knew all about it. Anyway, to get on—in our opinion you have stumbled across a new type of bomb that is so advanced as to make the A bomb completely obsolete. Briefly, it is easily possible that a bomb could be made of your formula and constructed in such a way as to be detonated by the final chemical. It could be used to wipe out

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whole cities, to wipe them off the face of the earth without a trace. Every stick, stone, human being and piece of mortar could be made to simply rise and disappear from the earth's surface within a matter of minutes. That's rather a terrifying secret to hold entirely in your own possession, Mr. Pillsworth."

"Yes, indeed," Marc said absently. "Terrifying."

"In other words, for the sake of national security, the government cannot possibly allow you to have your discovery all to yourself any longer. I'm sure you can understand that. We would like to talk to you and go over your formula in private. Your notes are still intact, aren't they?"

MARC'S HAND went automatically to the inner pocket of his jacket where he had secured the notebook. He nodded.

"Oh, yes," he murmured.

"Good. Then suppose we go to one of the...."

"I'd like to go home first, if I may," Marc broke in. "I have to see my wife before she leaves. It's very important. And there are a few extra notes in my room at the house. I could get them all together...."

The man hesitated for a moment, then finally nodded. "All right," he said. "After all we're the only ones who know about this. Only let me caution you not to talk to anyone."

"I won't say a word," Marc said, and nodded toward Toffee. "She couldn't say anything; she doesn't understand any of it."

"Fine," the man said. "Then will it be all right if we come to your house this evening?"

"That'll be fine," Marc said quickly, anxious to be free of them. "I'll see you then."

Marc and Toffee watched the two men disappear down the corridor and up a stairway.

"Terribly morbid pair, aren't they?" Toffee said. "It's enough to make your flesh crawl, all this talk about wiping out cities and people and things."

"It's their business," Marc said.

Toffee glanced behind her. "I don't like to mention it," she said in an undertone, "but there are a pair of perfectly loathsome little men back there, and I think they're following us. For my money they look exactly like spies. They seem to skulk, if you know what I mean."

"I know what you mean," Marc said. "I saw them in the courtroom. Probably they're perfectly harmless. Anyone who looked like that would have to be. Anyway, I haven't time to worry about any skulking; I've got to get home. Let's get out of here."

"Am I going with you?" Toffee asked.

Marc nodded. "I've decided it's the best way. We'll just sit down and tell Julie all about you."

"She'll never believe it," Toffee said. "If she does, she's a lot crazier than I think she is."

"She'll have to believe it," Marc said earnestly. "If worst comes to worst, I'll knock myself out and she can see you vanish and reappear for herself."

"We could ask the neighbors in too," Toffee observed wryly. "We could serve punch and do it as a sort of parlor entertainment."

"Don't be silly," Marc said. "Come on."

"I'm game," Toffee murmured. "I just wonder if Julie's up to it, that's all."

"Maybe I should call her first," Marc said, catching sight of a row of phone booths at the end of the corridor. "Just to make sure she's there."

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"You might check on the condition of her heart, too," Toffee said. "Just as a precaution."

They started forward and had nearly reached the booths when Marc suddenly stopped short.

"Now what?" Toffee asked.

Marc inclined his head to listen. "Do you keep hearing footsteps?" he asked.

"Sure," Toffee said. "All over the place. With these marble floors...."

"No, not those," Marc said. "Right behind us. I keep hearing someone walking right behind me, but there's no one there."

"Well," Toffee said slowly, "I didn't want to be the first to mention it, but..."

SUDDENLY, they were both silent, their eyes intent on the floor and a cigarette stub that had begun to behave with shocking abnormality. Still alight, as it had been dropped, it suddenly crushed itself out flat against the floor and ceased to smoke. It was for all the world as though someone had stepped on it to put it out, and yet there wasn't a human foot within yards of the thing.

"Oh, my gosh!" Toffee breathed. "Do you suppose that thing realizes what it can do to a nervous system with a trick like that?"

"What do you suppose it is?" Marc asked.

"It's a cigarette stub," Toffee said. "And it's gone mad. It's completely out of its head. Let's just pay it no mind, treat it with complete contempt. Maybe it'll crawl away and do its odious little stunt for someone who likes that sort of thing."

"You may be right," Marc said without the slightest tone of belief. He turned away, but his gaze remained furtively on the flattened stub. Since there was no further disturbance, he pulled himself together and started toward one of the phone booths. Toffee watched after him with careful intensity.

But if either of them thought they'd had the last of madness from inanimate objects, they were woefully mistaken. The phone booth was next to become possessed. It was as though the hulking enclosure had been waiting in prey for Marc. No sooner did Marc stick his head inside the booth than the doors, without any visible guidance, snapped shut, caught him by the neck, and held him fast. Toffee started back with a cry of pure surprise.

"Help!" Marc wheezed from inside the booth. "Help!"

It was a moment before Toffee was capable of action, but she did her best to make up for lost time. She started forward to the attack with a vengeance. But no sooner had she come within reaching distance of the booth and the door than she was mysteriously and invisibly thrust back. She renewed her efforts but was only repelled for a second time. She paused to consider the door, the booth and her own emotions, rapidly approaching a state of blind rage.

It was just as she had braced herself and hunched angrily forward for the third attack that the woman came out of the booth next to the one in which Marc was trapped. She took one look at the determined redhead and drew her own conclusions.

"Hold off, honey!" she screamed. "You can have the booth! I'm through!"

But Toffee had already hurled herself forward in a headlong, firm-jawed lunge. The woman screamed shrilly and departed the booth and the vicinity with the speed of a deer in season. In the next split second Toffee collided with Marc's invisible captor. There was a dull thud, a small

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skirmishing, and then Toffee, apparently bearing her opponent to the floor with her, went down in tangled triumph. The door of the telephone booth flew open and Marc dropped to his knees, gasping for air.

George, thoroughly humiliated at having been bested by a mere whisp of a girl, became emotionally confused, lost control, as before in the courtroom, and completely materialized. He looked up at Toffee sprawled untidily across his chest, and flushed.

"You didn't have to knock me down," he murmured woundedly.

Toffee glanced down at her defeated adversary and started with amazement.

"Marc!" she cried. "How did you get down there?"

At the phone booth Marc was still panting for breath. "Did you expect me to come out of there dancing a rhumba?" he asked peevishly.

Toffee whirled about. "Marc!" she yelled.

"Stop screaming my name at me," Marc said. "All I want is....!"

HIS VOICE retreated down his throat with a gurgle of surprise as he caught sight of George.

"Wha...!"

Toffee turned from one to the other. "Which one of you is which?" she gasped confusedly.

"I'm me," Marc murmured vaguely. "Who's he?"

Toffee sprang away from her perch on George's chest.

"Oh, mother!" she cried.

"Well," George said resignedly, getting to his feet. "I suppose that I might as well admit it, now that you've found me out." He turned to Marc. "I'm your ghost."

"Ghost!" Marc and Toffee sang it out together. As Marc sprang to his feet, they both closed in on George, crowded him back defensively into one of the phone booths.

During all this, the incident had attracted several innocent bystanders who were now looking on with baffled interest.

"What have they got in there?" one official-looking gentleman asked another. "Did you see?"

The other shook his head. "I think they said it was a goat."

"A goat? What on earth are they doing with a goat in there? Do you suppose they have the beast talking to someone on the phone?"

"If they have," the second replied, "it had better yell for help. They were crowding the poor thing something awful. On the other hand, maybe they just wanted to milk it. If it's a modest goat it might be reluctant about being milked right out here in the middle of the hall."

"I know I would," the first gentleman said, "if I were a goat. I wouldn't blame it a bit. It's shocking, just the thought of it."

"They're doing the best they can," the second gentleman reminded. "I can see where a reluctant goat wouldn't be the easiest thing in the world to get along with."

"Just the same, I don't approve," the first man said. "Not even a little bit. If the goat is shy, they shouldn't bring it out in public to milk it like this."

"Maybe they're trying to teach it social poise," the second man suggested.

"I don't care," the first said. "Livestock should be left at home. Someone should speak to the Health Commissioner about this!"

The second man shook his head with mild amusement. "That shouldn't be difficult for you," he said. "You are the Health Commissioner. Or did they get you in the last clean-up?"

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The first man looked at him sharply. "The devil you say!" he exclaimed. He thought about it for a moment. "By heaven, you're right. Sometimes I forget. I thought I was the Water Commissioner. Haven't been to my office for weeks to see what it says on the door." He started away, then turned back. "Why don't you come in and complain to me about this goat? It wouldn't look right if I complained to myself, would it? My secretary would think it was odd."

Meanwhile Marc and Toffee had wedged themselves into the doorway of the telephone booth and were staring incredulously at George.

"Well," George said uneasily, "haven't you ever seen a ghost before?"

"I should hope to tell you I haven't," Toffee said fervently. She looked at George with suspicion. "How do we know you're a ghost? Can you prove it?"

"Do I have to?" George said unhappily.

"It would help clear things up considerably," Marc said. "Personally, I don't believe a word of it."

George stared at them for a long moment, then sighed. "Oh, all right," he murmured. "If you insist. Of course this is terribly corny, and you probably won't like it, but it should give you an idea."

AS MARC and Toffee watched, George carefully controlled his ectoplasm, dissolved his head down to a grinning skull, and issued a low moaning sound.

"Mother in heaven!" Toffee said, closing her eyes. "Stop doing that!"

George, only too happy to do so, quickly rematerialized his head. "I told you you wouldn't like it," he said.

"But how could you be my ghost?" Marc said shakenly. "I'm not dead."

"Are you sure?" Toffee said. "Personally, I feel quite dead and gone to hell after looking at that."

"But you're supposed to be dead," George said with sudden self-righteousness. "If you were any good at all, you'd be mouldering in your grave at this very moment. You were supposed to have been blown to bits in an explosion. That's why they sent me."

"Who sent you?" Marc asked.

"I'd rather not discuss them, if it's all the same to you," George said.

"Well," Marc said, "I'm alive. So you can just go back to them, whoever they are, and tell them they're mistaken."

"But I don't want to go back," George said unhappily. He looked at Marc speculatively. "Couldn't you just sort of kick off?"

"I beg your pardon?" Marc asked incredulously. "Do I understand you right? Are you asking me to kill myself just to accommodate you?"

"Oh, you wouldn't have to do it all yourself," George said. "I'd be very happy to assist you."

"So!" Toffee cried. "So that's what you were up to! You were trying to strangle him with that phone booth!"

George shrugged sheepishly. "I didn't think I should pass up any opportunity. I'll admit it's not a very fancy way to die...."

"You fiend!" Marc said. "You horror!"

"Oh, please, no!" George objected woundedly. "You just aren't looking at the thing right, that's all. Fair's fair, you know. After all, I've been waiting years for you to pop off, and...."

"And you're going to wait a great many more years as far as I'm concerned!" Marc said.

"I was afraid you'd be narrow about it," George said dejectedly. Tears

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came to his eyes. "I've always had to take your left-overs. Your second name, even. I couldn't call myself Marc, because that was the name you wanted. I had to take George. It's unjust."

"Well, don't go on about it," Toffee said. "There's no use blubbering."

"You might just as well go away," Marc said firmly. "I'll be damned if I'm going to pop off, as you so picturesquely put it, just to please a spook with criminal tendencies." He glanced heavenward. "This, on top of everything else!"

The tears welled larger in George's unhappy eyes. He looked at Toffee and Marc and flushed at making such an open display of his emotions. To hide his feelings he sadly dissolved his head. The thin air above his shoulders echoed with a moist snuffle.

"Oh, Lord!" Toffee moaned. "He's up to his tricks again! Would you listen to that?"

"I wouldn't if I could help it," Marc said.

"Let's get away from this snivelling shade before he drives us crazy," Toffee said urgently. "I'm so upset I wouldn't be surprised if I walked out of here on my hands."

"The way he is right now," Marc agreed, "he's the most haunting ghost I've ever seen. I'll certainly never forget him."

Together, they turned and moved away from the phone booth and quickly down the corridor.

"He'll have to shift for himself," Marc said. "I've got other things to worry about."

As they moved away, out of the entrance of the building, several of the more curious spectators converged on the phone booth and glanced cautiously inside.

It was empty.

Outside, an officer showed Marc and Toffee to the green convertible which had been delivered there by the government men. Marc helped Toffee in, then crossed around and slid in under the wheel. With a look of determination, he shifted the gears and directed the car into traffic.

The sound of the shifting gears obscured the muffled snuffling sound that emanated briefly from the back seat.

CHAPTER VIII

MARC BRAKED the convertible to a stop at the signal and glanced worriedly in the rear-view mirror.

"They're still there," he said.

Toffee swung about in the seat and stared without subterfuge at the black sedan and it's occupants.

"It's those filthy twins," she said. "Even their car looks subversive."

Marc turned his attention again to the mirror. "They may be with the government," he said. "They've probably been assigned to watch us." He shrugged a dismissal. "Anyway, they're the least of my worries."

He released the brake and started forward again on the light. He did not mention the greatest and most immediate of his worries; an overwhelming attack of weariness had come over him in the last few minutes and it was alarmingly reminiscent of the one he'd suffered yesterday just before he'd begun to float. If he was about to become buoyant again he wanted desperately to reach home and Julie before it happened. He narrowed his eyes on the blur of the traffic ahead and tightened his grip on the wheel. He knew as he did it, however, that he was never going to make it.

Marc managed the next block without incident, and the next, but in the middle of the third, he swung the car

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sharply to the curb and brought it to a quick stop. In the next instant, just as he switched off the ignition, his head slumped heavily to the steering wheel. It happened so suddenly that he didn't notice the irony of his location; he had parked almost exactly in front of the Wynant. Neither did he see the black sedan pull up behind.

Toffee swung quickly toward him and gripped his shoulder. "Marc!" she called, shaking him. "What's wrong?"

There was a moment of tense silence and then, just as before, Marc revived as quickly as he had succumbed. He lifted his head from the wheel, and looked dazedly around.

"What happened?" he asked.

But Toffee was not concerned with the events of the past. "Oh, golly!" she wailed. "Look! There you go again!"

Marc glanced quickly down at the seat and suffered a thrill of horror. Toffee had spoken the truth; indeed, he was going again with all anchors cast off. He had already risen, still in a sitting position, to such a height that his knees were resting snugly against the steering wheel.

"Grab me!" he yelled. "Pull me down!"

"I am grabbing you!" Toffee cried, renewing her efforts on his shoulder. "Hang on to something!"

Marc bent forward and took hold of the wheel. The action threw him into a curious doubled-up position, so that he seemed to have braced himself against the device with his knees so that he might pull at it with both hands. To the casual passerby on the sidewalk it presented a rather intriguing problem in logic. A pair of shopgirls turned away from a window, started away, then stopped to observe the activity in the convertible with baffled interest.

"Why do you suppose he's so anxious to get that wheel off?" one asked, turning to the other.

"I can't imagine," the second said thoughtfully. "He seems terribly mad about something, though. I pity his girl friend."

"I should say. I wouldn't go out with a fellow with that kind of temper for a million dollars."

MEANWHILE the state of affairs in the convertible was swiftly becoming crucial. Marc was beginning to realize that the upward pull on his body was even stronger than before.

"Don't let me go!" he told Toffee. "Out here, it'll be the end of me!"

Then suddenly both he and Toffee looked around as a cough of expectancy issued ominously from the back seat. Before their apprehensive eyes a heavy flashlight swiftly raised itself from the floor of the car and darted menacingly forward. A chuckle of malevolent intent sullied the charged silence in the car.

"Go away!" Marc yelled. "Beat it, you homicidal haunt! George!"

But the flashlight continued forward, swung upward over Marc's clutching hands, and poised itself for a smashing blow.

"No!" Marc yelled. "No!"

Then, as the flashlight started swiftly downward, Marc closed his eyes and let go. Instantly, he popped upward out of the car and continued going. The flashlight shattered against the wheel and dropped dully to the floor. George promptly went about the business of materializing himself at Toffee's side. No sooner, however, did his face appear than Toffee dealt it a stinging blow.

"You low-living spook!" she grated. "I ought to scramble your ectoplasm for you!"

George blinked at her woundedly. "Why do you always blame me?" he asked. "I'm only trying to do my job.

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You're being a terrible sport about all this."

"And I'm going to get worse," Toffee said hotly. She glanced frightenedly after Marc who had already risen beyond the elegance of the Wynant canopy and was closing in rapidly on the second floor.

"He'll never stop!" she cried. "He'll go up into space and explode!"

The crowd, gathering quickly about the convertible, watched Marc's ascent with stunned silence. In back of the convertible, the door of the black sedan swung open and the Blemishes, like a pair of soiled moles, arrived on the sidewalk. They forced their way to the front of the crowd.

As the brothers looked upward, their unlovely faces, as nearly as they ever would, expressed true anxiety.

Above, Marc passed the second floor and rose swiftly to the third. He seemed to be gathering momentum on his upward journey. The fourth floor drifted by. His thoughts churned. He wanted to scream, but somehow there wasn't time. And then, miraculously, he was caught in a strong draft of wind, and thrown roughly toward the face of the building. He reached out frantically, grabbing, clutching for something to hang on to. And then his hand slapped against a window ledge, caught, and held.

Marc brought his other hand down to the ledge, found a hold and clung. He drew in a breath of relief and his whole body throbbed with the beat of his heart. As he hung there, his body continued upward, however, upending him crazily against the wall of the hotel.

Down on the sidewalk, the Blemishes were instantly inspired to action.

"Come on!" they yelled. "Let's fish him in!"

Toffee looked at the two men. She was in no mood or position to question any source of aid at the moment, no matter how questionable it appeared. She turned to George with cool hostility.

"You make a move out of this car," she threatened, "and you'll be only a ghost of a ghost when I get through with you." Then, swinging the car door open, she joined the dark Blemishes in a streaking dash toward the entrance of the hotel.

ON THE FIFTH floor of the Wynant, Mrs. Hunter Reynolds sat rigidly in her bathtub and stared with fixed horror at the face which had just appeared upside down at her bathroom window. An old belle of the old South, Mrs. Hunter Reynolds had ventured into the North expecting only the worst. Now the worst had happened.

The shaken lady gripped the sides of her tub and tried hard to prevent herself from sinking to a watery grave. She closed her eyes and reasoned sternly with herself; it was all a trick of the imagination; even a damnyankee head couldn't do the disgraceful thing this crazy head was doing. And then her eyes flew wildly open as the room suddenly dinned with a shouted plea for help.

At this point Mrs. Hunter Reynolds had a plea of her own to shout. "God in heaven, sir!" she said, trying desperately to maintain some last shred of dignity now that all decency was gone. "God in heaven, stop invadin' my privacy this way. I ask it in the name of the South."

"Help me!" Marc panted. "Come pull me in!"

Mrs. Hunter Reynolds started in her tub. "You're speakin' to a lady, sir!" she gasped. "Please go away. My water's gettin' cold."

"I can't help your water," Marc said unhappily.

"Sir!" the southern lady cried. "I'm

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not askin' you to help my water. I'm askin' you to leave my water entirely alone."

"Delighted," Marc wheezed. "I wouldn't touch your water with a ten foot thermometer. I'll close my eyes if you'll just give me a hand."

"If I give you a hand, sir," Mrs. Hunter Reynolds said coolly, "it will be across your insultin' damnyankee mouth. If you don't leave instantly I'll call my husband, the Colonel."

"For heaven's sake, call him!" Marc implored. "He can help me."

"It's more likely he'll whip you within an inch of your life." Mrs. Hunter Reynolds said stoutly. Swirling about in her suds, she faced the doorway, prepared to scream, then turned back to Marc.

"First, sir," she said. "Would you do me the pleasure of tellin' me if you are a whole damnyankee or only a damnyankee head?"

"I'm a whole damn...I'm whole," Marc said.

"Thank you, sir," Mrs. Hunter Reynolds said with a slight bow. Then she opened her mouth wide and screamed with unbelievable feeling and vigor.

"Hunter!" she shrieked. "Hunter! There's a whole damnyankee invadin' my privacy!"

Even before she had stopped screaming the door to the bathroom burst open and Col. Hunter Reynolds charged into view, obviously prepared to defend southern chivalry to the end, if necessary. Needing only a julep in his hand to complete the picture, he was a fair caricature of all southern colonels.

"Damnyankee, did you say!" he thundered.

"There!" his wife said, agitating her bath water. She pointed dramatically to the window.

"Gad!" the Colonel snorted. "That's the damndest damnyankee I've ever seen. He's upside down, isn't he? Gave me quite a turn for a second there. But it looks like he's had quite a turn himself." The Colonel chuckled foolishly at his own pleasantry.

"I'm the one who's had the turn!" his wife snapped. "Stop that silly gigglin' and titterin', you old fool, and do something."

The Colonel considered. "Yes, yes," he murmured. "I suppose I'll have to shoot the dog; there isn't enough of him to flog."

"My water's getting cool," Mrs. Hunter Reynolds mentioned fretfully.

"Good," the Colonel said absently. "Good. Keep it that way." He started from the room.

"Help!" Marc yelled.

The Colonel whirled about at the doorway.

"Not a word out of you, sir!" he said tartly. "Not a word!"

HE LEFT the room and almost instantly was back bearing a pair of ominous bone-handled dueling pistols. These he cocked carefully and aimed in Marc's general direction.

"Make your peace, sir," he said. He turned to his wife. "Close your eyes so you won't see this."

"No!" Marc yelled.

"Just a moment, dear," Mrs. Hunter Reynolds interrupted. "I don't like to interfere in the affairs of menfolk, you know that, dear, but don't you think we ought to keep in mind that we still have southern blood in our veins even if we are in the North?"

The Colonel observed his wife scowlingly. "How do you mean?" he asked.

"It isn't southern courtesy to shoot a man when he's a sittin' target."

The Colonel turned it over in his mind. "You're quite right, dear," he said finally. He turned to Marc. "Sir, would you mind movin' about a

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bit out there so I can shoot you in honor?"

"I can't!" Marc gasped. His arms were so tired, and his head so thick with blood, that he didn't care much at this point whether he was about to be shot or not. "Shoot me in cold blood," he said. "To hell with your honor."

The Colonel turned questioningly to his wife. "Should I?" he asked. "You heard what he said about my honor."

Mrs. Hunter Reynolds was hesitant. "Suppose the news got out around back home?" she said. "Folks would say you weren't a real southern gentleman anymore. They'd say you'd been tainted by the North. You'd never be able to hold up a julep in public again."

"For the love of heaven!" Marc moaned. "Either help me or shoot me, only make it snappy."

"Better not risk it," the Colonel decided. "I've got to have a moving target."

The bathroom became quiet with the heavy stillness of impasse. Then there was a ripple from the bathtub as Mrs. Hunter Reynolds brightened.

"I know!" she cried. "If the target can't move, why don't you? Wouldn't it be all right that way? You could rush about a bit and when you've got up your speed turn and shoot him."

The Colonel was silent for a minute, seeming to picture his wife's suggestion in his mind. Finally he nodded. He turned to Marc.

"Is it all right with you, damnyankee?" he asked.

"Anything's all right with me," Marc said hopelessly. "Go ahead. I don't even give a damn anymore."

The scene that followed established a new and fascinating high in sheer insanity. Girding his rusty loins against the first physical effort they had been forced to in years, the Colonel busily began to cavort about the room like a bloated rhino. Clumsily loping through an obstacle course of plumbing appliances, the old boy found it rough going at best. As for the Colonel's lady, she languished calmly in her cooling tub, soaped her arms, and watched her laboring husband with nodding approval. Marc, even beyond the point of mere resignation, closed his eyes and waited.

"Well," the Colonel wheezed, rushing once more to the end of the room and starting back again, "this is it!" As he ran, he trained the pistols loosely in Marc's direction. "Here I come! Ready . . . aim . . . . !"

It was at this climactic point in the bathroom drama that the door burst open and Toffee, closely followed by the two Blemishes, rushed into view.

"Stop!" Toffee screamed.

In mid-gallop, the Colonel turned sharply to observe the intruders, tripped over a clothes hamper, and descended to the floor in a deafening roar of gunfire.

As a cloud of smoke billowed up around the gallant man from the South, Mrs. Hunter Reynolds turned, looked briefly at Toffee and the Blemish brothers and sank into the depths of her bath with only a small gurgle to mark her departure.

TOFFEE ran to the window, motioning the brothers to follow. She emerged through the rising screen of smoke just in time to see Marc's fingers, white with tension, slip from the sill and disappear out of view.

"He's gone!" she screamed. "He's gone!"

The Blemishes crowded beside her at the window and leaned forward. They were just in time to catch the last glimpse of Marc floating serenely out of sight beyond the rim of the

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building as they watched.

"Come on!" Toffee yelled. "Up to the roof!"

"What for?" Gerald Blemish said bitterly. "He's gone, now."

"Well, at least we can wave goodbye," Toffee said. She started rapidly toward the door.

"My!" Cecil Blemish said, picking his way carefully over the prone figure of the Colonel. "Look at all the water in here. The old gaffer got the water pipes, two out of two."

It was barely seconds later when the skylight door at the top of the hotel flew open and Toffee and the matching Blemishes ran out onto the roof. They scanned the distant sky as they moved.

"He's gone!" Toffee cried despairingly. "He's clear out of sight!"

The brothers stopped and looked at each other without hope.

"Well," Cecil muttered. "There goes everything."

Then suddenly the trio straightened as a small voice called Toffee's name. It might have come from anywhere and it might have been any voice, it was so weak. Toffee whirled about, and instantly her gaze darted to the flagpole at the other end of the roof. There, like a flag unfurled, Marc was clinging to the top ornament for dear life.

"Marc!" Toffee screamed and ran to the pole. "Grab the rope and I'll pull you down!"

Cautiously, Marc took hold of the ropes, first one hand, then the other.

"Hold on tight!" Toffee cautioned and slowly began lowering him toward the roof. As she did so she glanced around at the twins. The two, in what seemed a rather pretty but confused tribute, were holding their hats stiffly over their hearts.

Toffee turned back to the pole, renewed her efforts, and brought Marc safely to ground. Then as he clung to the pole for security, she removed a couple of metal weights from the ropes and slipped them into the pockets of his jacket. Briefly, she kissed him on the forehead.

"You damned floater!" she breathed with relief and affection.

Gingerly, Marc released his hold on the pole and smilingly discovered that he was again stationary. With Toffee's help, he made his way to where the twins were standing, their hats still clasped to their chests.

"Retreat's over," Toffee said. "You can put the lids back on."

In unison the twins swung their hats up to their heads and held out the revolvers they had been holding under them.

"Get 'em up!" they snarled in chorus. "You're coming with us."

CHAPTER IX

EVEN THE elevators of the Wynant, and the procedures attendant thereto, had a tone of delicate breeding about them. As the doors parted, ever so smoothly, the mechanism emitted a sigh of unmistakable refinement, like a great lady giving vent to a genteel yawn of boredom behind an ivory fan. In the foreground was revealed a uniformed and finely drilled operator who always stood at rigid attention on the occasion of his passengers' debarkation. Thus it was, with all good taste, the Wynant guest was given every opportunity to arrive before the general public and the management with his best foot extended well to the fore. It was one of those small touches that contributed so much to making the Wynant the Wynant, and vice versa.

Now, however, the procedure of the elevators, like the best laid plans of mice and mollusks, suddenly went amuck. Eyes turned and widened sharply as the elevator doors flew

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open with an exclamatory rasp, and not the passengers but the operator quitted the conveyance. Putting one foot forward of the other with all the earnest haste of a scared wombat, it was evident that the poor devil didn't know or even care which of them was the best; he skittered across the foyer and around the edge of the desk with the speed and directness of a well-aimed shot.

"It's him!" the wretched man jabbered, cowering beside the clerk. "He's come back to get even with that statue!"

Meanwhile a scene of rather complex agitation had been revealed within the narrow confines of the elevator. It seemed that Marc, still increasing in the degree of his buoyancy, was no longer afforded any particular measure of security from the weights in his pockets. Even during the brief interval which had transported him from the roof to the foyer, he had levitated to the height of about a foot and was still inching upward.

Marc's companions were inclined to take a sour view of the whole procedure. Indeed, the Blemishes felt called upon to express their displeasure with firearms. Cecil Blemish aimed his gun at the small of Marc's back and sighted tensely down the barrel.

"Come down," he threatened. "Stop doing that or I'll shoot. I will, too."

"Stop that," Toffee said agitatedly. "Look where you're aiming. He's risen another four inches. There's no need to be vulgar about it."

"Oh, excuse me," Cecil said, and aimed the gun higher.

"If you two don't put those guns away and stop waving them about," Toffee said, "I'm going to snatch them away from you and beat your brains out with them. I'll admit it'll be something like hunting butterflies with a sledge hammer, but I'm willing to have a go at it. How about it?"

The twins paused in their activities and looked at each other.

"I'll bet she would at that," Cecil said.

"Those poor defenseless butterflies," Gerald nodded. "I shudder."

"And well you should shudder," Toffee put in.

Together the brothers turned to her with undisguised admiration.

"You're really mean," Cecil said. "Have you ever thought of being a spy?"

"Have you ever thought of being a dead spy?" Toffee said waspishly. "Now stop that nonsense and help me get him down. Find something to weight him down with."

MARC, ALREADY beginning to crouch to keep his head away from the ceiling of the car, looked down imploringly. "Just get me something to eat," he pleaded. "I'll be all right if you'll only feed me."

"You see," Gerald Blemish said. "He's just being stubborn. This is all just a childish trick to get us to feed him." He raised his gun again in Marc's direction.

"Don't be silly," Toffee said. She explained to the Blemishes that food reacted chemically to temporarily relieve Marc's condition of buoyancy. "Just help me get him down, and we can get him something to eat in the hotel dining room."

The brothers were thoughtful.

"I suppose we'll have to take her word for it," Cecil said. "Anyway, he's not much good to us up there."

"I suppose so," Gerald agreed, "but personally I think he's just the flighty type."

Cecil went to the door of the elevator and looked out. Then he stepped outside and called back to Gerald to come and give him a hand.

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Absentmindedly, Gerald started to hand his gun to Toffee, but at the last moment he thought better of it and put it in his pocket.

"It's hard to tell who's captured whom sometimes," he said sadly, and went outside.

In a moment the brothers were back, progressing slowly under the weight of a tremendous sand-filled cigarette urn. They shuffled to the center of the car and laboriously hoisted their cumbersome burden up to Marc.

"Here," Gerald panted. "Take it."

Marc regarded the thing without enthusiasm. "Good grief!" he said. "That thing'll break my back. Can't you just get me something to eat?"

"Take it," Toffee said shortly. "You can come and get your own food. And don't drop it. Personally, I don't intend to go galloping up to the top of this hotel again after you. Next time you take off, I'll just forward your mail to the moon and let it go at that."

With a sigh of hopeless resignation, Marc took hold of the urn, and the Blemishes let go and stepped back. Instantly Marc and the urn crashed to the floor with a tooth-rattling thud.

"Ugh!" Marc said.

"There, you see," Toffee beamed. "It works beautifully. Now, come on, let's eat."

And so it was that a moment later the diners in the Wynant dining room were suddenly shocked into silence by the arrival of the most bizarre dinner party ever to venture forth in quest of food. It was not enough that a combustible-looking r e d h e a d, garrishly clad only in a few precarious sequins, had arrived in their midst, this had to be followed by a tall, anguished gentleman bent double under the weight of an enormous cigarette urn. Why either the girl or her grimacing escort had chosen to arrive at dinner in their respective conditions was beyond comprehension. With this mystery to brood over, hardly anyone even noticed the duplicate, derby-hatted, bush-bearded horrors in the background. With great unconcern the party arrived at the head of the short stairway leading to the dining room and paused grandly in full view of the entire room. No one was more stunned at the sight of this questionable quartet than the *maitre d'hotel*. If the circus had come to town this elegant and formidable gentleman had not heard of it. He hastened forward to correct what was obviously a gross mistake.

"I'm terribly sorry..." he began in private tones.

TOFFEE recognized the attitude instantly. "If you think you're going to put us out of here," she said, "you're going to be much more than sorry." She nodded toward Marc. "This gentleman needs food. He's weak as a kitten."

Marc took up at the maitre de and bared his teeth in what he hoped was a reassuring smile.

The maitre de glanced away with a pained expression. Then looked quickly back.

"Isn't that one of our urns?" he asked sternly.

"We only borrowed it for a moment," Toffee explained. "You can have it back when we're through with it."

"I suggest that the gentleman put it back where he found it right now," the maitre de said coolly.

"I can't put it back," Marc gritted breathlessly. "For the love of Mike stop bickering and give me something to eat. I'm feeling weaker by the second."

"If you'd put that urn back," the maitre de said with growing hostility, "you wouldn't feel so weak." He turned to Toffee. "Does the gentleman

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fancy himself as an ash tray? Is that it?"

"Of course not," Toffee snapped. "Give him a table."

"If I give him a table to carry will he put down the urn?" the maitre de asked confusedly.

"Not to carry," Toffee said. "Give him a table to sit at. And food to eat. Stop talking like an idiot."

The maitre de became petulant. "I won't give him a table until he gives back that urn. He turned to Marc. "Give it back."

"I won't," Marc said. "I can't."

The maitre de stepped back a pace, then glanced wretchedly at the silent diners behind him. All eyes were trained incredulously on him and the unwanted foursome. He cleared his throat self-consciously.

"Please," he said, lowering his voice imploringly. "Please give back the urn and go away. Just set it down and turn around and walk out. You'll ruin me if you don't. I have a reputation to maintain. I've been known to send royalty back to their rooms for neckties before I'd give them service. A vice president fairly groveled before me once. These people are expecting something from me, and I can't let them down. Please, please go away!"

The party of four remained unmoved, either emotionally or physically. They stayed where they were, staring at the man with stoic calm and determination. The unhappy man turned desperately to Marc.

"For heaven's sake," he said, "have you developed some sort of fetish for that urn? Do you imagine yourself to be in love with it? Is that why you're hugging it in that awful way?"

"I'm not hugging it," Marc wheezed. "I'm carrying it."

"Where?" the maitre de asked bewilderedly.

"Anywhere," Marc said. "Just so long as I get something to eat. Please give me a table and some food."

The maitre de's jaw squared with sudden determination. "No," he said. "Flatly, no! I owe it to the Wynant dining room and these people here to stick to my guns. I'll give you till ten to take that urn and leave this room."

"I'd love to," Marc said weakly. "But I can't. Don't you understand?"

"Then just give the urn to me," the reluctant host said. "I'll see that it gets back where it belongs."

"No," Marc said. "Flatly, no."

The maitre de's face turned vermilion with a flush of rage. "Then suppose I just take it!" he said hotly. And with that he stepped boldly forward, wrapped his arms resolutely around the urn and began to pull. "Give it to me now," he grunted. "No use being stubborn, you know, it's not yours."

"Oh, good grief!" Toffee cried with exasperation. "Just look at them. Like a couple of crazy school kids with a dead mouse!" She turned to the Blemishes. "Do something!"

WITH DITTOED expressions of perplexity, the brothers regarded Toffee, each other, and the problem of the besieged urn. Clearly it was time for them to take steps, but they didn't know in which direction. Simultaneously they moved forward to opposite sides of the urn, secured a hold on it, and began to pull against each other. The spellbound clientele of the Wynant looked on in confused wordlessness; no one could guess why the cigarette urn had become so furiously important to these struggling men all of a sudden; obviously it contained nothing more wonderful than a lot of sand and a few stubs. One gentleman, staring in entranced rapture, carefully lifted a sizeable portion of steak on his fork, lifted it upward, and with preoccupied care, deposited it, complete

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with mushroom sauce, in the depths of his breast pocket.

Meanwhile the insane contest at the head of the stairs had arrived at a state of complete impasse. Four different energies pulled in four different directions, one balanced just enough against the other to hold the urn perfectly motionless. Other than a rapidly deepening blueness in Marc's face, there was no evidence that the men had not simply joined together to provide a grotesquely decorative stand for the urn. That this constituted a condition of utter absurdity, Toffee was the first to realize. She placed herself impatiently at Gerald Blemish's side and raised her hands to her hips.

"Just what do you think you're doing, you nincompoop?" she hissed. "Let go."

Gerald looked up at her unhappily, considered, then let go. The three remaining contestants staggered drunkenly aside, still clinging doggedly to the urn.

"Show him your gun," Toffee directed.

Gerald thought about it, then bestirred himself. He went over to the maitre de and tapped him lightly on the shoulder. The maitre de looked around.

"Look," Gerald said, taking his gun from his pocket and shoving it under the poor man's nose. "See?"

The maitre de knew when he was licked. Instantly, he let go of the urn and backed away. A look of great disillusionment came into his eyes. With a soul-searing sob he turned and sat down heavily on the steps.

"You've ruined me," he blubbered. "You've deliberately come in here and ruined my reputation. And I know who's behind it all; Felix of the Gaylord!"

"Oh, dear!" Toffee said. "Please don't do that. Don't cry. I just can't stand to see a man cry."

Cecil Blemish relinquished his hold on the urn and joined his brother at the ruined man's side. In the background, Marc sagged limply under the sudden weight.

"What's the matter with him?" Gerald asked.

"We've ruined him," Cecil explained briefly.

The maitre de shuddered with a new convulsion of self pity.

"Now, look here," Toffee said kindly. "There's no reason to go on like this. I'll tell you what. Why can't we all cooperate in this thing? We want food and you want to throw us out. Why don't we just compromise? We'll take a table and eat and then we'll let you throw us out. You can make a terrible scene, and we won't say a word." She turned to the Blemishes. "That's fair, isn't it?"

"Oh, very," Cecil said enthusiastically. "We're wonderful at being thrown out. We act cowardly as anything, we snivel."

"Oh, we snivel beautifully!" Gerald confirmed.

"Fine," Toffee said. "Why don't you do a little sniveling right now? Just show the gentleman what he can expect. It's bound to cheer him up."

TOGETHER the Blemishes descended to their knees beside the sobbing maitre de. Then, contorting their faces into expressions of despicable self-abasement, they began to make small damp sounds of cowardly beseechment. Tears began to course down their faces and into their beards. Slowly, the maitre de raised his head and looked around. Then with a cry of purest horror he leaped to his feet and bolted from the room as though pursued by a thousand devils.

"I quit!" he screamed as he disappeared in the direction of the kit-

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chen. "I go back to the automat!"

"Poor man," Toffee murmured. "Definitely the ulcerous type." She turned to the sniveling Blemishes. "Stop that awful noise and get up."

Marc struggled forward under the weight of the urn. "I can't hold out much longer," he said.

Supremely unaffected by the horrified silence which had fallen over the room, Toffee turned, surveyed the table accommodations, and sighted a place in the center of the room.

"Follow me, men," she said.

As the strange party made its way to the middle of the room in sedate silence, heads turned everywhere to follow its progress. Marc just made it to the edge of the table. Toffee and the Blemishes seated themselves as though their arrival had been accomplished in a completely orderly manner. The Blemishes, in a formal mood, didn't bother removing their hats.

"What about me?" Marc gasped. "Am I supposed to hold this thing in my lap?"

Toffee studied his predicament through thoughtful, half-closed lids. "No," she murmured, "you couldn't do that." She glance around, at the Wyman's markedly heavy silverware. She promptly picked up her own place setting and dropped it in Marc's pockets. The Blemishes quickly followed suit.

A moment later Marc's pockets fairly bulged with purloined silver. The other diners looked on with awed fascination.

"Have you ever seen anything so flagrant?" a woman at an adjoining table whispered. "I've heard of people stealing a knife or fork for a souvenir, but...well...cleaning out the whole table!"

"Even the salt and peppers," her companion observed, half with admiration. "Before they get through there'll be nothing left of this hotel but the hollow shell."

Toffee regarded Marc with satisfaction. "That should hold you," she said. "Unburden yourself."

Willing to risk anything by now, Marc put down the urn. He remained stationary. With an echoing sigh of relief and a loud clattering of silver, he seated himself at the table.

"Thank God!" he groaned.

The other diners, feeling that they were now in for a period of respite, turned back to their cooling meals and a general buzz of low-key conversation. It was at this moment that a waiter, just on duty and starkly unappraised of recent developments, made his entrance into the dining room, picked up a pitcher of water, and went to the aid of the newcomers. He moved forward with the light step of the happy and the innocent. Toffee saw him coming.

"May we have more silver?" she asked.

The waiter stopped short, put the pitcher of water down heavily on the table. The dining room quieted for a second time.

"What happened to the silver that was here?" he asked. "A Wynant table is never left without silver."

"Oh, that," Toffee said. "We used all that up."

"For what?" the waiter wanted to know. "What did you do with it?"

Toffee pointed blandly to Marc. "He has it in his pockets," she said.

Marc shifted in his chair with musical unease and refused to meet the narrowed gaze of the waiter. There was a long moment of silence before the waiter turned back to Toffee.

"You mean he just picked it up and put it in his pockets?"

"Oh, no," Toffee said. "Of course not. We picked it up and put it in his pockets for him." She nodded to her

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dark-browed accomplices.

FOR A MOMENT the waiter stood undecided. One could almost see the desperate churnings of his mind. Finally he bent low toward Toffee in a manner of great confidence. "Since you're so open about the whole thing," he murmured, "I trust you and your friends are playing some sort of game to amuse yourselves. I assume that you intend to take the silver back out of the gentleman's pockets and return it to the table. Am I right?"

"Certainly not," Toffee said. "We wouldn't think of it."

"I'd be very pleased if you would," the waiter said a bit more firmly.

"Oh, you wouldn't be pleased at all," Toffee said. "You'd despise it. Now just run along and get some more silver."

"So you can stuff this fellow's pockets with it?" the waiter said. "If you put any more in them they'll rip off."

"We want to eat with it," Toffee said.

"How novel," the waiter said. He turned to the Blemishes and blanched slightly. "Would you . . . uh . . . gentlemen please remove your hats?"

"Now look here," Toffee said. "There's no use getting petty about this thing." She nodded toward the vacant chair on the other side of the table. "Sit down, and I'll explain everything."

The waiter gazed on her with heavy disdain. "I can't sit down," he said.

Marc, on his side of the table, had looked away for a moment, his attention caught by the frankly admiring glance of a dark, heavy-lidded lady at the next table. There was about her an unmistakably continental air, and Marc couldn't help noticing that her neckline had plunged and crashed somewhere in the neighborhood of the *Arc de Triumph*. He flushed and turned away.

"Oh, please," he said anxiously, to no one in particular. "Please give me something to eat."

"Can't sit down?" Toffee said to the waiter. "For heaven's sake, why not? Has something happened to your . . . ?"

"Of course not!" the waiter said quickly. "It isn't allowed. Waiters never sit with the guests at the Wynant."

"Why not?" Toffee asked. "Is there something the matter with the waiters here?"

The waiter opened his mouth to answer, then was silent with thought. "I don't know," he said finally. "I guess there's nothing wrong with us. At least I think I'm all right. I don't see why I shouldn't sit down. If I'm invited, that is."

"Then have a seat," Toffee said.

"Thank you," the waiter said with a slight bow. "I don't mind if I do." With great deliberation he turned, regarding the other diners with a look of scornful defiance, then crossed around the table and sat down. "Now, about that extra silver you wanted . . ."

A gasp echoed through the room. At the far side a bejeweled matron rose from her place with a snort of outrage and stiffly departed the room. In the meanwhile Marc had turned imploring eyes to the only quarter from which he had so far received any attention at all. The heavy-lidded lady smiled slowly.

"Would you give me something to eat?" Marc asked weakly. "You have so much there and . . . If I don't get something soon I'll drift off into space."

"It is such a feeling as I have often suffered myself," the woman said in a heavy French accent. "But never for the want of food. I could not forgive myself to turn away a man with the hunger."

"I've got the hunger something

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fierce," Marc said.

"Of course, monsieur will pay the bill?"

"Sure," Marc agreed eagerly. "Anything."

THE LADY reached out a tapering hand to the table and picked up a piece of paper covered darkly with figures. She handed it to Marc.

Marc glanced at the total and blanched.

"Champagne is so expensive in this country," the lady said regretfully. "And to me it is like water."

"Obviously," Marc murmured. "You must wash your clothes in the stuff." He held out his hand. "But never mind. Just give me the food."

"You have only to open the mouth," the lady smiled. "I will feed you with my own hands." Her eyes held his own with a suggestive glint. "It will be sweeter that way."

"Just give me the plate," Marc said.

The woman paid no attention. "You will drink the wine of my country from the cup of my hand, like a great, thirsting beast." She laughed throatily. "It is so that we make love with the meal."

"Doesn't it get awfully messy?" Marc asked ruefully. "Or do you wear gloves?"

"Love is never tidy," the woman breathed, leaning close to him. "Not when it is worthwhile. Love is always a beautiful, beautiful mess."

Marc, more embarrassed than enthralled at this invitation to amour among the foodstuffs, was not aware that Toffee had paused in her conversation with the waiter and fastened her eyes with brooding hostility to the back of his neck.

"And now," the French temptress was saying, "the monsieur will part the beautiful lips so Lisa can give him the food of love."

"Oh, yeah?" Toffee put in hotly from across the table. "If the monsieur parts the beautiful lips Toffee will part his teeth for him!"

Marc started guiltily. "Now, Toffee . . . !"

"Stand back from that French pastry, you philandering gourmet!" Toffee said, getting up from her chair. "When I get through with her there's going to be a lot more broken than just her speech!"

"She's only feeding me!" Marc said.

"Yeah," Toffee sneered. "The food of love. I heard her." She swung toward the woman. "I'm the dietitian around here, honey, and don't you forget it."

"I only show the monsieur how she is done in the old country."

"Well," Toffee said, "get a load of how she's done in the new one. Prepare yourself to get fractured, you Parisian petunia!"

And with that the turbulent redhead snatched the plate of squab that rested in the tapering hand of the enchantress and carefully emptied its contents into the lady's elaborate hairdo.

"Mon dieu!" the woman screamed as she shot out of her chair. She swung about and eyed Toffee malevolently through a trickle of gravy. "So! The mademoiselle would be the wildcat, eh?" She glanced quickly about for ammunition and found it on a neighboring table. Scooping a plate of soup from beneath the owner's very spoon, she turned furiously and prepared to hurl it into Toffee's face. "I have never been so insult in all my life!"

"Put that soup down, Fifi," Toffee warned, "or you're going to get insult in places you didn't know you had."

The soggy siren did as she was told, but only by accident. As she started toward Toffee, the plate of soup slithered out of her hand, looped gracefully through the air and landed upside down in the lap of a lavender-

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laced matron. Heaving herself from her chair, the matron trumpeted her displeasure to the assemblage at large, armed herself with a pitcher of water, and entered the fray. Stepping with great dignity to the side of the beseiged European, she heaved the contents of the pitcher in the general vicinity of her midsection. Then, with great pleasure, she threw back her head and laughed. Just in time to receive a plateful of oysters squarely in the face.

IN THE NEXT moment the entire room had entered into the spirit of the occasion. Naturally repressed, the guests of the Wynant were quick to seize upon this opportunity to give expression to their pent up feelings. Pandemonium ruled the room from end to end. Trays and diners slid across the floor together with an air of abandoned democracy. Mrs. Jones, having long resented the upward tilt of Mrs. Smythe's nose, did her level best to lower it with a sauce bottle. The action, for the main part, however, gravitated frenziedly toward the center of the room where it had started. Toffee, having applied the squab to her victim, was now gustily engaged in massaging it into the scalp, all the way to the bone if possible.

Marc, for his part, was busily engaged in reaping the spoils of the battle. He picked up an abandoned roll here, an unwanted steak there, and even occasionally caught a delicacy as it flew through the air. He stuffed himself as ravenously as a starved roadworker at a free lunch. The Blemishes remained seated at the table, thoroughly confused and disillusioned at the activities of the upper classes. The waiter merely leaned back in his chair with an enigmatic smile and enjoyed to the fullest the spectacle of these people doing to each other what he had been secretly tempted to do to them nightly for several years.

Marc, still concerned with the matter of dining, reached out for an abandoned pudding and discovered new and still more alarming element in the fracas. Just as his hand was closing in on the dessert, the dish suddenly leaped into the air, poised itself carefully, then sailed across the room to catch a portly gentleman neatly at the side of the ear. In a seizure of surprise, as the gooey mess dribbled into his collar, the man whirled about and dealt his female companion a stinging blow across the bridge of her nose.

"Oh!" he gasped in instant regret. "I'm so terribly sorry!"

For a moment the woman only stared at him without expression. Then, with slow calm she reached out to the table, picked up a bottle of wine, carefully removed the cloth from around it, and belted her abject attacker a solid blow across the crown of the head.

"Perfectly all right, lover," she murmured as she stepped over his prone figure and started from the room. "Don't bother getting up."

Marc turned back to the table and frowned sternly.

"George," he said t e n t a t i v e l y. "George, I know you're there, so there's no use hiding. Show yourself."

"Of course," George's voice said out of space, with malicious levity. "In a moment. Wonderful fight, isn't it?"

"George!" Marc said.

But there was only silence from the ghost. M a r c gazed speculatively around, peering anxiously into the ranks of the warring diners for some sign; there was no telling what the sporadic spook might undertake in a situation of this sort. It was only a moment before the worst of his fears were realized.

There was only a slight disturbance around the cigarette urn at first, a

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faint billowing of the table cloth. Then, as though someone had secured a grip on the thing... as George indeed had ...it suddenly lifted into the air. There was a period of shifting and balancing, then it lifted steadily upward until it was above the heads of the embroiled diners.

"No!" Marc yelled at the top of his lungs. "George! Put it back!"

Instantly all was silence in the dining room as the warring guests froze in various attitudes of combat and cast frightened eyes upward at the floating urn. The enchantress from France, her hand clutching at Toffee's hair, was somewhat more affected than the others.

"I haf loose my reason!" she wailed. "I am departed from my wits in this land of barbarians!" Then, becoming considerably more heavy-lidded than before, she wilted quietly to the floor.

Meanwhile the urn had continued upward, paused, sighted its course, and started viciously in Marc's direction. George's plan was hideously plain; he meant to dispatch his earthly part to the hereafter by means of bombardment.

"Run, Marc!" Toffee screamed. "Run!"

Marc, however, now laden with food, silver and lead weights, was all but incapable of flight. He started forward, but only ploddingly. Loaded to the teeth with ballast, his progress was not only extremely noisome, but greatly retarded.

"I can't run!" he panted.

IN THE NEXT moment the urn had arrived at a position almost directly above him. It shuttled nervously back and forth, evidently adjusting for a direct hit. Toffee dashed toward the table and the petrified Blemishes. She bent quickly over Cecil and snatched the revolver from his hand.

"Bombs away!" George's voice sang out jubilantly from the region of the urn. "Fire one!"

"Oh, Lord!" Marc moaned fervently. He struggled desperately to reach one of the tables so that he might take shelter under it.

And then, just as the urn plunged downward, three shots thundered deafeningly through the room. Marc was suddenly caught in a rain of sand and shattered pottery.

At the table, the Blemishes jumped to their feet and threw their hands above their heads.

"We surrender!" they yelped in unison.

Then Cecil turned around, saw Toffee, the gun in her hand. He reached out and took it from her.

"You're not supposed to have that," he said woundedly. "What kind of prisoner are you, anyway?"

"Sorry," Toffee said. "It was an emergency."

Then she ran to Marc, followed by the Blemishes, and began to scrape some of the debris from his head and shoulders. No sooner had she arrived, however, than another crisis loomed on the horizon. The door of the dining room flew open and the manager of the Wynant, accompanied by two of the city's finest, ran inside.

"Arrest them all!" the manager screamed shrilly. "Arrest everybody!"

"Get down!" Toffee said quickly and dragged Marc with her to cover beneath the nearest table. The Blemishes followed swiftly after.

In the deathly stillness that ensued, the manager and the two policeman advanced menacingly into the room. Then suddenly they stopped as a jangling sound broke the quiet. It was as though a handful of silver had been dropped to the floor somewhere across

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the room. It was obvious, however, that there was no one in that direction.

"Okay, Bill," one of the policemen said. "Let's round 'em up!"

In the activity that followed no one noticed the kitchen doors swing open, quietly and slowly, to permit the curious passage of four crawling figures.

"I don't know," Toffee said, crawling over the feet of an astonished chef. "I don't know where everyone gets the idea this hotel is so elegant. I've been here only twice and it's been raided both times."

CHAPTER X

MARC AND Toffee, on their feet now and making strides as rapidly as possible, emerged from the alley behind the Wynant and hurried along the sidewalk, bound in the direction of the green convertible. At a distance, the Blemishes scurried along after them with grim determination.

Turning the corner at the end of the block, they arrived at the front of the hotel which was now the location of considerable activity. Toffee paused to watch the dining guests being escorted by the police from the hotel to several official conveyances which had arrived under the canopy.

"Come on," Marc said. "Get in the car before they see you."

Toffee nodded and followed the suggestion. Marc crossed around the car and slid quickly under the wheel.

"There still may be time to catch Julie," he said anxiously.

Toffee favored him with a sullen stare. "I almost hope there isn't," she said. "For her sake. If she didn't have grounds for divorce before, she's certainly got them now—the way you were dallying around with that French trull...."

"I wasn't dallying," Marc said. "I was only trying to get something to eat. Lord knows you were willing to sit there and let me starve to death."

He switched on the ignition and started the motor.

The car was just pulling out from the curb when the Blemishes arrived in a grim dog trot and placed restraining hands on the edge of the door. Together they regarded Toffee and Marc with baleful hurt. And produced their revolvers. Marc braked the car to a stop.

"Golly," Toffee said, turning to Marc. "I forgot all about them."

"What do they want?" Marc asked.

"You remember," Toffee said. "They captured us up on the roof. They think we're their prisoners." She turned back to the pouting brothers. "Look, boys," she smiled like a patient parent with a pair of fanciful and rather dreadful children, "we just haven't got time to be your prisoners right now. We'd love to, really but we've got to leave. Why don't you call Marc up on the telephone some time and..."

The brothers shook their heads in doleful coordination.

"Now, why be difficult? We'd be just crazy to have you capture us some other time, but right now... It's not that you're not perfectly sinister and all that... Now put those guns away and go spy on someone else for a while."

"No," said Cecil. "Huh-uh."

"Huh-uh," Gerald echoed.

Marc leaned forward impatiently. "Look here," he said firmly. "I don't have time for any more of this nonsense. I've got to get home. Now either you get off this car or you don't, but I'm leaving."

For a moment the brothers looked

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at each other in sad consultation. Then, as though having reached a decision by telepathy, they simultaneously quitted the side of the car and stood back a pace. Marc threw the car into gear and prepared to leave. However, just as he was pressing down on the accelerator the whole street suddenly boomed with the sound of gunfire. The car jarred forward, then settled into a lop-sided stop. The Blemishes grinned happily on their handiwork; they had air-conditioned both tires on the right side.

ATTRACTED by the sound, one of the officers in front of the Wynant started forward, but Cecil waved him back.

"Just a blowout!" he called. He pointed to the crippled car. "We'll see that he gets fixed up."

The officer nodded and went back to his chores with the Wynant guests.

"Why, you little...!" Marc grated.

"Holy smoke!" Toffee broke in, staring steadily at the two brothers. "Those kids are using real bullets and everything!"

"That's what we've been trying to tell you," Cecil said mildly. "We're just as mean as we can be."

"You certainly are," Toffee agreed. "You're just about the most awful little grubs I've ever run into."

"Sugary phrases aren't going to get you anywhere," Gerald said virtuously. "Now get out of that car and come with us."

Marc and Toffee stared at each other with silent bewilderment; they were completely nonplussed. Slowly they got out of the car and presented themselves on the sidewalk.

"Now, just a minute, boys..." Marc said.

"Shut up," Gerald snarled. "Our car is right behind you. Get in the back seat and sit quietly."

Toffee turned and looked at the black sedan. "I wish that thing didn't look so much like a hearse," she said unhappily.

"It's going to look more like a hearse if you don't shut up and do what we say," Cecil said.

With that clammy piece of news, Marc and Toffee advanced to the forbidding vehicle in question and deposited themselves stiffly in the back seat. Cecil and his gun joined them in the back, while Gerald climbed into the front and started the engine.

"It's so embarrassing," Toffee said disconsolately as they pulled away from the curb. "That's what hurts; being shoved around like this by a pair of subnormal pygmies."

"Where are you taking us?" Marc asked. "What do you want with us?"

"None of your business," Cecil answered promptly. "And what do you care?"

"Oh, go on, Cecil," Gerald said from the front, guiding the cumbersome automobile through traffic. "Tell them. They're going to find out anyway."

"We never told in the movies," Cecil said sullenly. "It spoils the suspense. We always said none of your business and what do you care. You're just sore because I said your line."

"Go on," Gerald said. "Tell them."

"Oh, all right," Cecil said. He directed his attention as well as his gun toward his waiting captives. "I think you're familiar with our profession?"

"Profession," Toffee murmured. "That's a laugh."

Cecil ignored it. "Then you should be able to guess that our real interest is in you, Mr. Pillsworth, and your formula. That's what we want."

"I haven't got the formula," Marc lied. "I turned all my papers over to

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the government."

"That's a lie," Cecil said flatly. "We're in the complete confidence of the government, and we know you still have the formula yourself. You shouldn't be so dishonest, Mr. Pillsworth; it makes a bad impression."

"Please forgive me," Marc said with heavy irony. "And what if I do have the formula? I don't have it with me."

"You can recreate it," Cecil said with confidence. "Just so long as we get it first, before anyone else does. That's the important thing. If you don't recreate it, we'll kill you. Quite dead, you may be sure. We can always find your papers. Really, the only reason we've taken you into custody, so to speak, is to keep the formula from the government. Otherwise, you're actually not important to us at all."

"What do you want with the formula?" Marc asked. "What in the world would you do with it?"

"Electrify the world," Cecil said with an unexpected intensity. "This is just the sort of thing we've always been waiting for. Your formula will give us a chance to do something really big. Everyone will be talking about it."

"About what?" Marc asked apprehensively.

"The bomb, of course," Gerald said from the front. "We're going to make a bomb from your formula, like those government men talked about."

"What for?" Marc said. "What good would it be to you?"

"What good?" Cecil said. "Are you serious? We're going to make our reputation with it. Everyone will be after us to come spy for them when we've finished with the bomb. Won't they, Gerald?"

"Everyone," Gerald agreed. "With the possible exception of the United States. Personally, I even anticipate a few offers to make a comeback in the movies."

A LOOK of eager anticipation had washed unbecomingly over Cecil's awful face. "We're going to make this mammoth bomb, you see," he said, "and we're going to float away this whole entire city. Just like that!"

"What!" Marc started. "You mean you're actually going to...!"

Cecil nodded dreamily. "They won't be able to overlook us then," he said. "People will stop being so friendly and treat us with proper respect for a change. We'll just make the city disappear over night!"

"Oh, no!" Toffee said.

"Good grief!" Marc murmured. He gazed out the window at the passing city, the people, the shops, cars, skyscrapers. He tried to imagine all these things torn loose from the earth, twisting and turning into space. His mind revolted before the picture. The idea was too terrifying for words. Marc trembled with horror. That he should be the one to provide the instrument by which such a fantasy could be set into motion was too awful to contemplate.

"You can't!" he breathed. "You can't be human and even think of such a thing!"

"You see!" Cecil said, his eyes bright with enthusiasm. "You're already impressed, and we haven't even started. Of course, if you want, we'll cut you in on the deal. It would be worth it to get your cooperation." He turned to Toffee who was staring at him with unguarded loathing. "You, too."

"I'd rather die," Toffee said.

"Well," Cecil shrugged, "if you'd really rather, it can be arranged."

"It won't work!" Marc said desperately. "It's preposterous!"

"It worked with you, didn't it?"

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Cecil pointed out.

Marc thought back to his frenzied flight to the top of the Wynant. A chill passed through him; anything was possible.

"But why the whole city?" he asked. "Why not just a building or a retired battleship?"

"More spectacular," Cecil said. "It'll cause more comment."

"That's so understated," Toffee said, "it's below the level of reason." She looked at Marc. "They're mad," she said, "raving."

"I know," Marc said in hushed tones. "They're just mad enough."

"Oh, you bet we are," Cecil said with a sudden mood of happiness. "We're regular ogres, aren't we, Gerald?"

"Well, I wouldn't say *regular* ogres," Gerald answered.

"Would you say *irregular* ogres?"

"No," Gerald said with due consideration. "Irregular sort of suggests those advertisements. You know the ones about people who are uncomfortable because..."

"Just listen to them!" Toffee moaned. "They're planning on blowing up the city and they go on about it as giddy as a couple of spinsters in spring! What difference does it make what kind of ogres you are? You're perfectly abhorrent, both of you."

Cecil smiled his crooked smile at Toffee. "Thanks," he said modestly.

"Don't mention it," Toffee said. She turned away with a little shiver. Then suddenly she brightened. Gerald had just brought the car to a stop at an intersection. At the center of the street a truly enormous cop was presiding over traffic. Toffee looked back at the revolver in Cecil's hand, then at the cop. She decided to risk it. She threw back her head and screamed with all the sureness and tonal brilliance of an operatic heroine saying farewell to her lover.

"Murder!" she screamed. "Arson! Blackmail! Fire! Flood! Famine."

Then, satisfied that she had covered the field of catastrophe sufficiently to capture the attention of even the most unimaginative cop, she stopped and settled comfortably back in her seat. Noting that the cop was already on his way toward the car, she folded her arms complacently and smiled at Cecil.

"Now we'll see who gets taken into custody," she said smugly.

The cop stuck his head in the window, looked bewilderedly at Marc and Toffee, then took in the Blemishes. His face widened with a grin.

"Hello, boys," he said amiably. "What's the trouble? Read any good plans lately?"

"No, they haven't," Toffee put in quickly. "But they're trying to. Officer, arrest these two."

THE COP'S smile faded into an expression of purest astonishment. "Arrest *them*?" he asked incredulously. "What on earth for?"

"They're abducting us," Toffee said. "That's what for."

For a moment the cop just stared at her, then he threw back his head in a roar of laughter.

"Those two?" he gasped. "Abducting you?"

"That's what I said," Toffee snapped. "What's so funny?"

"That's right, officer," Marc said. "They're trying to steal a valuable formula from me."

"Of course they are," the cop said with amusement. "They're always trying to steal a valuable formula from someone. And every once in a while they actually get one. But what difference does it make? They couldn't do anything with it if they wanted to. Now why don't you just make them

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out a copy like a good fellow and hand it over? It'll make them happy as hell, and it won't do you any harm."

"No harm, you dumb flatfoot!" Toffee said, losing control. "Just step inside here for a minute and I'll hammer that thick skull of yours till you can use it for a serving platter."

"There's no call to get nasty," the cop said.

"But you don't understand," Marc said earnestly. "These men mean to use my formula to destroy the city. They're going to float it off into space."

The cop turned and observed Marc closely. He nodded to Gerald. "Better keep a close watch on this one," he said. "He's got some funny notions in his head. He might do you harm."

"My God!" Toffee cried. "Now *we're* crazy!"

"That's a good sign, lady," the cop said soothingly. "They say if you realize your condition and are willing to fight it there's hope of a cure."

"I'll kill him!" Toffee cried. "I'll kill him with my own two hands! Look here, you jelly-headed gendarme, these two are dangerous criminals!"

"Criminals?" the cop said. "Them? Why they wouldn't hurt a fly. Just look at their faces."

Toffee looked at the Blemishes, then came close to choking. The twins had assumed expressions of angelic innocence such as might have been equalled only by Little Eva in the moment of her ascension.

"Why, you dirty little frauds!" she hissed.

"All right," the cop said, "you'll have to get along now; you're blocking traffic."

As Gerald set the gear and put the car in motion once more, Toffee fell back in her seat, weak with emotion.

"There's one guy I'll enjoy seeing blown into space," she said. "I hope he gets air sick."

The mood in the car deepened after that, and there was silence. Gerald made a left turn and headed the car away from the center of the city. Marc and Toffee stared pensively at the passing scene while Cecil hummed a soundless tune and smiled annoyingly over private thoughts; presumably of the devastating thing he and his brother were planning to do. Evening deepened into final night and lights began to glitter everywhere. And then the incident of the door occurred.

IT WAS JUST as Gerald brought the car to a stop at an intersection that the door promptly opened itself, wavered for a moment, then closed. Unmistakably it marked George's arrival. Toffee looked up sharply.

"George?" she said, and her voice was almost hopeful.

There was silence. Gerald glanced around with a smile.

"Did you see the door open and close just now?" he asked without alarm.

"Uh-huh," Cecil said casually.

"A ghost, I guess," Gerald said.

"You two may think your joking," Toffee said. "It really was a ghost."

"We know," Cecil said. "Gerald and I believe in ghosts. Always have. We've had quite a few of them around from time to time. At least we think we have; ghosts are hard to tell about sometimes."

Gerald turned to the empty space beside him. "Make yourself comfortable, ghost," he said graciously. "Just knock twice when you want to get out."

"You see," Toffee said to Marc. "They're getting crazier by the minute." Then she paused thoughtfully. "Or are we?"

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"Pretty tough getting a ride at this time of night, I imagine," Gerald was saying chattily to thin air. "Particularly being a ghost and all." He waited but there was no answer. He turned back to Cecil. "Doesn't want to talk, I guess." Then, as the traffic ahead began to move, he shifted gears and started forward. Thus occupied, he didn't notice that his revolver had suddenly become possessed of a life of its own; he didn't see it nose out of his pocket and take flight into the air.

Toffee nudged Marc excitedly. "Look," she whispered. "He's going to help us."

Together they watched breathlessly as the gun moved furtively upward. Then they started with surprise and horror as it righted itself and pointed its muzzle purposefully in Marc's direction.

"No, George!" Toffee cried. "Don't shoot! It's those two you want! They're planning to blow up the city and float it away. Liquor and all, George!"

The gun faltered, then started to turn uncertainly toward Cecil. But not fast enough. Cecil suddenly reached out and slapped it free of George's invisible grasp. The gun described a small arc into the back seat and landed in Toffee's lap. Marc, Toffee, Cecil and presumably, though there was no way of proving it, also George, all reached for the gun at once. The result was a writhing snarl of reaching arms and clutching hands. Toffee giggled dementedly.

"Stop that!' she screamed. "I'm ticklish!"

"This is no time to indulge in mad laughter," Marc grunted sharply. "Our lives are at stake."

"I know!" Toffee trilled lightheartedly. "I'm frightened sick! Only get your hands out of my ribs!"

As three sets of madly working hands rose, twined together, the gun danced wildly from the fleeting grasp of one to that of the other.

"Good grief!" Toffee said. "Even if I got hold of the thing I'd never know it; I can't tell which hands are mine!"

The hands and the gun traveled higher in the air, then suddenly one of the hands rose above the others and reached viciously for the errant firearm. It struck it, without catching hold of it, and sent it crashing to the back of Gerald's unsuspecting head. Gerald instantly let go of the wheel and slumped down in his seat. The car swerved dangerously to the wrong side of the street. Momentarily the warring factions in the back seat, now concerned with more immediate matter of navigation, disengaged their hands and forgot the gun as it fell to the floor at Toffee's feet.

"George!" Toffee screamed. "Grab the wheel!"

Apparently the ghost followed the suggestion for the car suddenly veered sharply to the left and, with a screech of the tires, darted into a gas station. George's voice echoed worriedly out of thin air.

"How do you stop this thing?"

But there was no answer. Toffee, now certain that the car was at least temporarily under control, reached down for the gun. So did Cecil. So did Marc. The struggle in the back seat started afresh just as it had left off.

WHEN THE black sedan entered the station, Pat O'Brien, a young and stalwart Irishman with red hair, viewed its arrival from within the station house and strode forward with the simple thought of serving his public. As the car sped past the pumps and circled back, Pat assumed that

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the driver was merely bringing the vehicle in line with the pump of his choice. However, Pat thought it somewhat queer when it continued past the pumps the second time. As it turned back for the third time, and he noticed that there was no driver and that the back seat was the scene of a life and death struggle between two men and a girl, he began to have quite a definite feeling that things were not exactly as they ought to be.

"Faith," Pat said to himself. "There's an uncommon thing goin' on here."

Then he jumped back into his enclosure as the car turned for still another swooping run at the pumps. Pat sat down on a stool to collect his thoughts in his own sluggish way. The company policy dictated clearly that the customer was always right, but Pat wasn't certain but that this mightn't be the exception that proved the rule. Then he grew more positive of it as he watched the black sedan plunge to a crashing stop against one of the gas pumps and send it tilting a bit to the leeward. Pat reached for the telephone and asked for the police.

As he waited he noted that a revolver had leaped from the back window of the car and skidded across the pavement, that the rear door of the car had flown open and three struggling figures had tumbled out. Then a gruff voice, equally as Irish as his own, took his attention.

"Faith," Pat said.

"Faith, yerself," the voice said. "And who's callin'?"

"It's me," Pat said. "Pat O'Brien."

"Is it now? That movie actin' fella?"

Pat flushed modestly. "Oh, no, sir," he said. "Just plain Pat O'Brien, down at the gas station."

"Oh," the voice said with a new note of chattiness. "There's a good lad. And how's yer dear ma, Pat?"

"The picture of health," Pat said, "even if she is down with the gout, poor soul." Then suddenly he turned away from the telephone, his eyes drawn to the struggle by the pumps. Things seemed to have gotten quite far out of hand. The girl had taken the hose loose from one of the pumps and was swinging it determinedly at the head of the small man in the derby. It did not help matters that she had managed to trip the mechanism and was hurling gasoline in all direction. Worse than that, however, was the behavior of the water hose; all by itself it had risen in the air, like a huge, spiteful snake, and had begun adding water to the deluge.

"Faith," Pat commented darkly. "It's a terrible thing."

"Do stop repeatin' yerself like that," the voice on the telephone answered. "It makes you sound like a proper ninny, it does. What is it that's a terrible thing? Is it in a professional capacity that you're callin' me?"

"And so it is," Pat affirmed. "It's a bit of advice I crave. The company that owns this station says that the customer is always right, but I'm wonderin' if it's still true when the world's gone mad?"

"And in what way has the world gone mad, Pat?"

"Well," Pat said, "there's a girl here in the dooryard who's spittin' out gasoline all over everything."

"How's that!" the voice said. "This girl, you say, she's spittin' out gas? Do you mean to say..."

"With the aid of the pumps, to be sure," Pat explained fairly. "And, if you'd believe it, it's butterflies she's wearin' in the place of her clothes. They're all hollerin' and yellin' and

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carryin' on something frightful. It's probably the end of the world all right."

"Patrick O'Brien!" the voice said with sudden sternness. "Shame on you! It's a fanciful lad you've always been, and I've been of a mind to forgive you it for bein' a comfort to yer gouty ma, but when you start callin' up a poor tired cop like me and runnin' off at the mouth about gassy girls and yellin' butterflies... Shame is all I've got to say to you."

"I didn't even mention the water hose," Pat said stubbornly. "It's the end of the world, I'm confident."

"It's the bottom of the bottle!" the voice snapped. "My advice to you is to soak yer head in cold water and say a prayer that the devil doesn't take yer soul. Goodbye to you."

The telephone clicked loudly in Pat O'Brien's ear.

"Faith," Pat said sadly. "And that's the last time I'll hold conversation with the law." He slumped back on his stool and turned his eyes to the company rules which were pasted on the wall; there was no mention anywhere as to proper procedures in the event of the world's end.

* * *

Outside, however, the struggle at the pumps came to an abrupt end as Cecil won possession of the revolver. He turned and aimed it at Marc. Promptly the splatter of gasoline stopped, as did that of the water.

"All right," Cecil said, "get back in the car and wake up Gerald."

For a moment Marc and Toffee stood motionless, gazing at the fanatic gleam in Cecil's eyes. Then slowly they turned and started toward the car. Both of them knew very surely that the little man would hesitate considerably less than a second at the act of murdering a man...or a city...

CHAPTER XI

THOUGH it couldn't possibly have been more than a couple of hours, it seemed that they had been twisting and turning through the night for eternities. Long ago the lights of the city had slipped away into the darkness behind them. Marc had completely lost track of where they were.

George, the unpredictable ghost, after a brief narrative about how he had fender-hopped his way back into Marc and Toffee's company, had drifted off into unconcerned and discordant slumber. Between snores, made forgetful by sleep, he had fully and completely materialized. If the Blemishes noted the exactness of the ghost's features to Marc's they didn't bother to comment on it; apparently the brothers, in their feverish dementia, were perfectly willing to credit anything as natural.

Gerald sped the car through a long wooded lane, then turned sharply to the right into a private drive. At last, for better or for worse...with the balance heavy on the less attractive side...Marc and Toffee arrived at the destination chosen for them by their crazed captors.

As the car ground to a stop Marc and Toffee peered fearfully out the window and were greeted by the sight of an enormous, turreted old house that loomed in the night like a preposterous, rococo mountain. It was the sort of place that the newspapers would surely describe as a 'mystery manse.' Neither Marc nor Toffee felt called upon to make any comment as to the majesty of the structure or the loveliness of the gardens that surrounded it. Cecil nudged his gun in their direction.

"Get out," he said. "This is it."

"Yes," Toffee said glumly. "But

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what is it?"

In the front seat Gerald shook George and the recital of the nasal passages snorted to a stop. Blinking, George sat up, observed his state of materialization, then looked around.

"Eh?" he said. "Where are we?"

Toffee turned back at the door of the car. "You know, George," she said, "next to an open grave, I think we've found the ideal place for you to settle down. I wouldn't be surprised if you didn't meet a lot of your old friends here."

The party climbed out of the car and assembled before the old house. Then, with Gerald leading and Cecil guarding the rear, they creaked up a long set of wooden steps, crossed a littered veranda, and brought up before a formidable oak door that was easily large enough to accommodate the comfortable passage of a fat elephant with its ears flapping. Gerald produced a key and unlocked the door. As he shoved it open it swung back on a cavern of unbroken darkness.

"Look out for bats," Toffee said.

"Just step inside," Gerald said.

"Leaving all hope behind," Marc added in a whisper.

The company moved slowly forward into the darkness. Even George seemed somewhat loathe to cross the threshold, but he managed it. When they were all inside Cecil closed the door after them and relocked with a gritting sound that fairly scraped the spine. There was the sound of movement close by, then the click of a switch. Instantly there was light.

"Oh!" Toffee cried in amazement. *"Oh!"*

STARING dumbfoundedly at the amazing thing that had risen before them, the three newcomers remained where they were, incapable of movement.

It was as though the hulking house had simply been scooped hollow with an enormous spoon. Where there had once been partitions and floors, there was now nothing but an area of great gaping space. The house had originally been four stories high, now it was merely one; from where Marc and Toffee and George stood gaping, the garret ceiling was clearly visible. Within the walls of the old house there were literally acres of unbroken space. But that was only the least of it.

The place was simply crammed with strange, incomprehensible equipment, mechanisms whose purposes were completely unguessable. Enormous coils writhed sinuously, twining themselves about great metal tubes that stretched high into the air. Wheels turned smoothly within wheels that turned within wheels. At the far end of the room a great slide shot gleaming metal tracks upward into one of the turrets, and then on into the night. A panel of switches ran the full length of one wall.

"Well?" Cecil said. "How do you like it?"

"If you'll pardon the vulgarism," Toffee said, "this is the damnedest shanty I've ever seen. What is all that stuff for anyway?"

"Well," Gerald said slowly, "we're not exactly sure about all of it ourselves. Of course our main interest is in that big machine in the center." He pointed to a mammoth arrangement of wheels, tubes, dynamos and levers. "We call that the production unit. With the proper adjustments you can produce almost any mechanical or chemical device known to man. With that machine alone, and enough raw materials, of course, a single man could match the output of any of the nation's largest factories. The inventor only made it just to have something to do. Actually, he was going to destroy it. Said it would make mankind useless." He turned to Marc.

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"There won't be any trouble making the bomb...or even a thousand bombs ...with that."

"What happened to the inventor?" Marc asked uneasily.

"Oh, him," Gerald said with a note of sadness. "Unfortunately he met with an untimely end just after we met him." He nodded to the gleaming track. "He was explaining that space catapult to us, telling us how a man wearing the proper equipment could be thrown out into space, even into regions unknown to man, and live to tell the tale. He was just telling us how to work the lever when suddenly the thing went off with him in it." He lowered his eyes delicately. "If ever a man went to heaven, it must have been poor Mr. Adams. At least he was certainly headed in that direction the last time we saw him. Anyway, Cecil and I like to think he's just away on a little trip."

"How terribly sweet and sentimental," Toffee said acidly. "I suppose he wasn't wearing the right equipment at the time?"

"Alas, no," Gerald said. "Anyway, Mr. Adams was a very strange man. He had no practical sense at all. He just stayed here all alone and built all these things just to see if they really *could* be built. He had no idea of ever putting them to any commercial use. He never saw anyone or had any friends apparently. It seemed a little sad at the time that Cecil and I, both virtual strangers, were the only ones here to see him off."

"Still, he seemed lonesome for company," Cecil put in. "He was very nice to us when we came here. It was only by chance that we found him, you know. We were out this way looking for a hideout...we thought we ought to have one since all the other spies did...anyway, we got lost and stopped here. Mr. Adams took us in just like we were old friends. I guess he wanted someone to show his inventions to. Maybe we really shouldn't have pulled the switch on the old man that way, but he kept saying he needed to get away somewhere...."

"The only decent thing to do, really," Toffee murmured.

"Exactly," Cecil said. "At first... after Mr. Adams left... Gerald and I toyed around with the idea of making mankind useless, but we decided that mankind would probably enjoy it too much, and things are moving in that direction fast enough anyway. But we always knew this stuff would come in handy someday if we just waited." He turned to Marc. "And now you've come along with your bomb."

"May God forgive me," Marc said bitterly.

CECIL pointed to another catapult arrangement, smaller than the one which had launched Mr. Adams into regions unknown to men, and aimed considerably lower.

"We'll send the bomb out with that," he said. "That was Mr. Adams' first experiment with the catapult. It will direct a missile accurately anywhere in the world. In fact, at full strength, it can throw a two-ton weight around the world three times. Nonstop."

"A two-ton weight of what?" Toffee asked.

"How should I know?" Cecil asked. "What difference does it make?"

"All the difference," Toffee said emphatically. "It would be perfectly preposterous for anyone to want to go flinging a two-ton weight around the world three times." She paused. "Unless, of course, it was a two-ton weight of something you hated so much you wanted to see it going away from you three times."

"That's neither here nor there," Cecil said shortly. "The main thing is

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to get the bomb made as quickly as possible." He turned to Marc. "I hope you're ready to go to work?"

"Right now?"

Cecil nodded. "We plan to start tonight, Fortunately, every known chemical is on hand here. Mr. Adams was amazingly thorough. Would you rather write the formula down for us, or call out elements as we go along?"

"And let me warn you," Gerald put in, "you'd better be accurate. We're planning a test bombing, just to make sure. If it doesn't work you may have an opportunity to meet Mr. Adams in person."

Marc was hesitant. "It'll take time to scale the formula to your needs," he said. "I don't know that I'll be able to do it tonight."

"Well, we can get started at least," Cecil said. He turned to Gerald. "Don't you think we should tie them? Wouldn't it be more professional?"

"Oh, sure," Gerald said. "Only I think chains would be better than ropes. More effective. You know, like the ones we used in our last picture, *Mr. X and Madam Q?* We can chain them up and threaten them for a while."

"We haven't got time to threaten them," Cecil said. "Do we have any chains?"

"Oh, lots," Cecil said. "I'll go get them."

In the meantime, everyone had forgotten about George. Unobserved, the materialized ghost had wandered interestedly in the direction of the giant catapult. Noting the compartment provided for the human missile, he turned back and studied Marc's lean figure with thoughtful calculation. He stroked his chin for a moment, then nodded with satisfaction.

In a moment Cecil returned, dragging several lengths of chain after him. At gun point, Marc and Toffee seated themselves in chairs at the far side of the room and submitted unhappily to an iron-clad captivity. George, however, was permitted to move about freely; the brothers had quite rightly reasoned that since ghosts were notorious for romping about in chains, George would probably be quite unhampered by them. After that, cautioning Marc to get to work immediately thinking about the formula, they dispatched themselves to the huge contrivance in the center of the room and began busily setting dials and levers.

Marc and Toffee considered the current state of affairs without heart. Toffee turned to George, who had left the catapult and had now arranged himself lazily on a nearby scaffolding. She smiled demurely.

"Nice George," she cooed. "You're going to help us, aren't you George? You're not going to leave us sitting here in these awful cold chains. We might catch cold."

George crossed his arms complacently over his chest and shook his head. "You should have been nicer to me," he said pettishly.

"If there's anything I hate," Toffee said, "it's a spoiled spook." She turned to Marc. "What are we going to do?"

MARC shrugged hopelessly. "Just stall, I guess," he said, "as long as we can, anyway."

"And then what?" Toffee asked. "Are you going to give them the formula?"

Marc shook his head. "No."

"They'll kill you."

Marc sighed. "I suppose they will. I only wish I could see Julie again, and explain everything to her."

Toffee smiled with unexpected softness. "You really do love her, don't you?" she asked.

"I guess I must," Marc said, "or I wouldn't feel this way."

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For a moment they were silent. Then Toffee suddenly brightened.

"I know what!" she cried. Marc looked up hopefully. "It's so simple I don't know why we didn't think of it right away. All you have to do is go to sleep!"

"Go to sleep?"

"Sure. Don't you remember? I told you. When you go to sleep, I dematerialize. But when you wake up I'm automatically recreated through your awareness. But I can place my shots, so to speak. You see? All you have to do is go to sleep. I'll disappear and then, when you wake up again, I'll materialize somewhere else and go to the police for help."

Marc thought it over. "It's worth trying," he said. "Do you know how to get back to town?"

"No," Toffee admitted, "I don't. But the main thing is just to get out of here, isn't it?"

"I don't see how I'll ever get to sleep, though," Marc said. "With so much on my mind it doesn't seem possible."

Toffee nodded thoughtfully. She glanced around, looked at George.

"Hey, George!" she called. "Do you know what Marc was just telling me about you?" The ghost looked up. "He said you were the lousiest ghost in the racket. He said he wouldn't hire you to haunt a rabbit hutch."

An expression of dismayed hurt came over George's face.

"Well?" Toffee said. "Are you just going to sit there and take it? He also said you wear second hand ectoplasm. If I were you I'd belt him over the head with something."

George slowly roused himself from the scaffolding and drifted down to earth. He confronted Marc.

"Did you say all that?" he asked woundedly.

Marc exchanged a quick glance with Toffee. "Well, not exactly," he said. "All I said, really, was that you can't haunt worth sour apples."

"Oh, yeah?" George said. A menacing scowl came into his face.

"Yeah," Marc said. "You couldn't scare a nervous kitten."

George's face flushed with anger. "I could too," he said.

"You and how many Frankensteins?" Marc asked.

"Why, you...!" George exploded.

"Go tell your mother she wants you." Marc said. "Stop wasting my time."

George whirled about, reached down and picked up a large chunk of wood. He waved it under Marc's nose. "Don't you talk to me like that!" he said.

"Beat it, you phony, before you get your sheet dirty," Marc sneered. "You're not scaring anyone."

That did it. With an unintelligible burst of wrath and hurt pride, George lifted the block of wood and brought it down on the top of Marc's head. Then suddenly he started back, his mouth agape. It wasn't that Marc had slumped, unconscious, in his chair ...that was only to be desired and expected...but Toffee, with a slight rattle of her chains, had mysteriously disappeared before his very eyes.

"Oh, my gosh!" George quavered. "How spooky!"

At the same moment, attracted by the noise of the chains, the Blemishes abandoned their work and advanced rapidly onto the scene. They surveyed the empty chair with wonder, then turned to George.

"What happened?" they chorused. "What did you do?"

George looked at them helplessly. "I don't know," he said. "I hit him and she vanished. That's all."

"Good grief!" Cecil said. He thought quickly. "She must be somewhere inside the building. She couldn't get out." He turned to Gerald. "Let's hunt her out."

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Just as they were turning away, Marc stirred and lifted his head from his chest. With great effort, he opened his eyes and glanced at the empty chair beside him. He smiled.

"What happened?" he asked with great innocence.

BENNY BUCKINGHAM and his partner Dippy Donahoe crept through the night in stealthy pursuit of their careers. If the two seemed to keep late business hours it was only because of the nocturnal nature of their chosen profession. Plainly, Benny and Dippy were house breakers, and if they took pride in their work and labored long to get ahead it was only a tribute to their mothers' faith in them.

Benny and Dippy were perfect partners in that they were perfect opposites. If Benny was large, Dippy was no bigger than a minute, or perhaps even fifty nine seconds. Where Benny was an extremely homely man, Dippy was terribly dapper. There was one thing, however, that this pair held in common; neither of them was noticeably bright in the head.

Now they crept toward the Maynard mansion, burglary in their hearts, black jacks in their hands and nothing at all in their heads. When, upon arriving at the veranda, they were greeted by the sight of a shapely young redhead decked out in a set of glittering butterflies, it never occurred to them for a moment that the girl could be any other than the mistress of the house, out for a moonlight stroll in her negligee. Summing the situation up thusly, they promptly ducked down behind the balustrade. But they had paused too long; the girl had already seen them.

"Hello!" Toffee called, leaping to the conclusion that she had discovered the occupants of the house. "Hello, there!"

Benny and Dippy peered up sheepishly over the edge of the balustrade.

"My heavens," Toffee said. "I'm glad you came along."

Benny and Dippy exchanged a puzzled glance; they weren't used to being welcomed on occasions like this.

"You are?" Benny asked suspiciously. "How come?"

"I need someone to help me. I can't get in the house, and I've got to use the telephone."

"Locked out?" Dippy asked politely. He proceeded warily to the veranda, waving Benny along behind him.

Toffee nodded. "Would you let me in, please?"

Dippy glanced uncertainly at Benny, and Benny nodded. He turned back to Toffee. "Delighted," he said. "Which door would you like opened?"

Toffee waved her hand at a long line of French windows. "Oh, any one of them," she said. "I don't care."

With a flourish, Dippy produced a small tool kit from the inner reaches of his jacket and went to work. In a moment the door was open.

"There you are," he said. "Bet you couldn't do it faster with a regular key."

"Thank you," Toffee said. "Were you just coming in?" she asked.

Benny and Dippy, mistaking this for an invitation, stood back for a moment, astonished. Then, loathe to look a gift horse in the mouth too long, they followed after her.

"Gosh, what a dame!" Dippy whispered to Benny. "She's got more guts than a fish cleaner. Or do you suppose we're losin' our menace?"

Toffee crossed the room, found a light switch, and turned it on. The most beautiful dining room she had ever seen rose up out of the shadows around her.

"Isn't it nice?" she said. "You must be very happy to have found this place. Everything's so expensive."

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"Oh, we are, lady," Benny said weakly. "We're very happy." Just then the large suit case which he had been carrying under his coat slipped and thudded to the floor.

"Oh," Toffee said. "Were you thinking of packing up a few things?"

"Well," Dippy said unhappily, "yes, to tell you the absolute truth, lady, that's exactly what we had in mind."

"Well, don't let me stop you," Toffee said airily. "Go right ahead while I use the telephone." She left in the direction of the hall.

"Holy gee, Dippy!" Benny exclaimed. "Is that broad right in the head? She acts like she wants to be robbed."

DIPPY glanced around the room. "Maybe she don't like this stuff and wants to get rid of it. Or maybe it's some sort of insurance pitch. Maybe she's been out there choppin' up and down the front porch for nights, just waitin' for a couple of guys like us to come along. It's screwy."

Benny shrugged. "Well, maybe we should cooperate with her. What have we got to lose?"

Together they went to the side board to investigate. They pulled open a drawer that fairly gleamed with expensive silver.

"Oh, boy!" Benny said. "Just look at that stuff."

"Yeah," Dippy said, and picked up a handful. But his manner was hesitant. "You know," he said, "it don't seem fair to the profession."

"Uh-huh," Benny said. "I know. Funny, ain't it? We always been complainin' about how people take such an uncooperative outlook on our trade and all, but...oh, gosh...."

"Yeah," Dippy said gloomily. "Why didn't she just go on about her own business and leave us alone? She could have at least screamed and carried on or somethin'. That ain't too much to ask from somebody you're robbin'. She's just takin' an unfair advantage of us, that's all."

"Maybe she just don't know any better," Benny suggested charitably. "Anyway, let's take some of the silver, just a little. She might get her feelings hurt and get sore as hell if we don't."

Just then Toffee came into the room and observed the scene at the side board without concern.

"Oh," she said brightly, "taking the silver, I see."

With a sigh, Dippy gently replaced the silver he'd taken from the drawer. "You see, Benny?" he said. "See what I mean? She just ruins everything. She don't give us a chance."

Benny turned to Toffee. "We were only takin' a few pieces," he said halfheartedly.

"That isn't going to do you any good," Toffee said. "If you're going to take any of the silver you'd better take it all. But, of course, that's your business, not mine."

Dippy's shoulders sagged dejectedly. "She makes me feel like bawlin'," he said.

"Yeah," Benny said. "She went and took all the heart out of it."

"I wonder if you two would mind doing something else for me?" Toffee asked. "The phone's dead...."

"Yeah," Benny said. "We cut the wires. I'm sorry. I wish it had been my throat."

Toffee looked at them curiously; she couldn't imagine why anyone should want to cut the wires to their own telephone. Then it occurred to her that perhaps it was their way of shutting off the service. Obviously they were packing up to leave on a trip.

"Well," Toffee said. "I wonder if you'd mind running me into town? I have to see the police."

The shattered burglars sharted violently.

"You see!" Benny cried. "You see!

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It's a trap! She's gonna turn us over to the police."

"Turn you over to the police?" Toffee said, thoroughly confused. "What on earth for? You've been very nice to me. Your private lives are your own business as far as I'm concerned. It's very urgent that I get to the police immediately. Won't you help me?"

For a moment the two thugs just stood and stared at each other. Then Benny heaved a great sigh.

"Come on," he said. "Let's take her in, Dippy. Let's give ourselves up. After tonight I ain't never goin' to feel the same about the racket no more."

"Yeah," Dippy said. "Me neither. Come on, lady. We got a car down the road."

As they turned to leave, Toffee crossed the room to join them.

"Aren't you taking anything with you?" she asked.

The two erstwhile thieves stopped and turned to her with expressions of overwhelming grief.

"Lay off, lady," Benny said with sad solemnity. "You just ruined our whole careers. Ain't you never satisfied?"

MEANWHILE, back at the old house, the Blemishes and George, after a fruitless search for Toffee, had returned to Marc's chair. The Blemishes had fallen into a mood of dark contemplation, while George had returned to his scaffolding and his day dreams. Then suddenly Cecil broke the stillness with a snap of his fingers.

"I'll bet I know!" the little man said. "Hey, George!"

George roused himself. "Yeah?" he said.

"You say you hit Mr. Pillsworth and the girl disappeared? Just vanished?"

"Uh-huh," George nodded. "So help me, that's what happened."

"Then that's it!" Cecil cried. "I've read about it, but this is the first time I've seen it!"

"What's that?" Gerald asked.

"The girl is a thought creation! She isn't real!" He turned to Marc. "That's true, isn't it, Pillsworth?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," Marc said.

Cecil turned to Gerald. "With him awake, she's probably running around somewhere, looking for the police. We've got to do something to bring her back." He thought for a moment. "Do you remember where we put those hypodermics?"

"I'm not certain," Gerald said vaguely.

"Then run along and look for them. Hurry before she goes too far."

As Gerald hurried away, Cecil turned back to Marc with a slow smile. "This is going to work out just fine," he said. "We'll give both you and the girl a nice long sleep. I doubt she's had time to do any harm yet."

IT WAS only a few minutes later that Benny pulled the car to a stop in front of the police station.

"Well," Dippy said with muted gloom, "here it is, lady."

Toffee opened the door and started to get out. "You coming along?" she asked.

Benny shook his head. "They'd never believe it if we told 'em even. We're goin' to open up a religious liberry instead."

"Well," Toffee said affectionately. "I certainly want to thank you two for being so kind. I just hope I didn't interrupt anything for you."

Frantically, Benny threw the car into gear and it fairly leaped away from the curb. Toffee stood for a moment staring after them; she could have sworn she'd heard a strangled sobbing sound echo back from the

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car as it sped away. She turned and started up the steps to the station.

She walked to the door and was just about to shove it open when her gaze went to the stack of newspapers lying to one side of the entrance. She looked at the headline: PILLSWORTH DISAPPEARANCE SHROUDED IN MYSTERY! She picked up one of the papers, folded it quickly under her arm, and continued inside.

Finding herself in a hallway, she paused uncertainly. Then a door at the end of the hall opened and a large man in a blue uniform moved into view. She ran forward.

"Look!" she cried. "Maybe you can help me. I want to speak to someone about Marc Pillsworth. I know where he is."

The officer swung about abruptly. "Marc Pillsworth?" Toffee nodded. "Come with me."

"We'd better hurry, though," Toffee said. "I may not have much time."

The officer led her rapidly down the corridor, up a flight of steps, along another hallway, and finally stopped before an unmarked door.

"Come on in here," he said. He opened the door and held it back for her.

But suddenly Toffee had stopped and a curious look of panic came into her eyes.

"Oh, no!" she gasped. "Oh, Marc! Not just yet!"

And then, as the officer's eyes grew wider and more frightened, she slowly faded away....

Back at the old house, Cecil watched with satisfaction as Marc sagged limply in his chair. He withdrew the hypodermic from Marc's arm and turned to Gerald.

"Okay," he said, "let's go to work on him."

CHAPTER XII

WITHIN the old house there was little evidence of the morning outside. Mr. Adams had boarded over the windows and now the daylight shone through only at the openings of the turrets where the tracks of the catapults reached for the sky. Even these openings, however, had heavy metal shutters which could be closed against bad weather.

For the moment everything was quiet. The Blemishes were settled at a small table, poring over several sheets of paper. George slumbered loudly on his scaffolding, while below him Marc drooped limply in his chair, held there only by virtue of the chains about his shoulders.

Then, as the patches of day at the turret openings grew lighter, Marc stirred. As he sat up, the chains made a small rattling sound. The Blemishes glanced up sharply from their studies.

Painfully, Marc lifted his head and looked out at the world around him with dulled eyes. A blurred vision of Toffee instantly swam into view. She seemed to be holding a newspaper in her hand.

"There, you see!" Cecil told Gerald. "I was right. She's a thought creation."

"Never heard of it," Gerald said.

"Very rare," Cecil commented shortly. "Particularly one that positive."

Across the room Toffee ran quickly to Marc's side.

"What have they done to you?" she cried. "What happened?"

Marc shook his head, forced awareness into his brain. He concentrated on Toffee's words.

"Happened?" he said. Then his mind cleared a bit. "I don't know. They doped me. With a needle. They found out about you."

Toffee whirled on the Blemishes

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with utmost loathing. "If I had a rat trap, I'd offer you some cheese," she said. She turned back to Marc. "I should have stayed away, I suppose, but I had to find out what they'd done to you."

"Did you reach the police?" Marc asked anxiously.

Toffee shook her head.

Marc sighed. "I feel awful."

"They won't get away with it," Toffee said. She picked up the paper from where she'd dropped it on the floor. "Look. They're searching for you." She read the article quickly:

Foul play was suspected since Marc was known to be the inventor of a new explosive. It was believed that he had fallen into the hands of foreign agents and might even have been removed from the country. The search for him extended around the world.

"You see," Toffee said. "They'll find you sooner or later."

"If they don't kill us first," Marc said. "I feel dead already."

Toffee got up and went over to the Blemishes. "Just what did you little vultures do to him?" she asked angrily.

Cecil shrugged. "A little of this and a little of that," he said. "A lot of truth serum."

"Yeah," Gerald sniggered unalluringly. "Enough to get the formula out of him." He looked down significantly at the papers on the table.

Toffee stiffened. "Why, you...you ...reptiles!"

Ignoring her, Cecil turned to Gerald. "I guess we don't need Pillsworth any more, do we?"

"Well," Gerald said, "we'd better keep him around until after the test. Just in case, you know. We should be able to whip out the formula before tonight if we get right to work. We can take care of Pillsworth tomorrow."

Cecil nodded toward Toffee. "What about her?"

"Oh, she's no problem at all. She'll go automatically when he does."

"How'll we do it?" Cecil asked.

FOR A MOMENT Gerald stared dreamily off into space. "We could starve him for a day and just let him drift off of his own accord."

"That would be fine," Cecil said. "Sort of poetic."

"On the other hand," Gerald said, "that wouldn't leave us any corpse to show for our trouble." He sighed. "You know very well, Cecil, that corpses always distress me, and in any line of work but ours I'd be definitely opposed to them. Still, for business reasons it would be a nice thing to have one around. You know, just tossed casually over a chair or table somewhere, where people can see it when they come to interview us for spy work. It makes a good impression."

"That's right," Cecil said solemnly. "A dead body can be impressive as the deuce when it's used to good advantage. Of course it should be in good condition. But nothing ostentatious."

"Oh, my gosh!" Toffee moaned. "They talk about dead bodies as though they were Spanish shawls!"

"Anyway," Gerald said, "let's worry about Pillsworth when we come to him. Right now we've got to get busy with the formula."

"All right," Cecil said. "Only just remember, if we decide to keep the corpse, there mustn't be any blood on it. I can't stand blood; it's so common."

At that point the brothers turned to observe Toffee with expressions of small annoyance.

"What about her?" Gerald said. "Hadn't we better chain her up again?"

Cecil nodded. "And we'd better make sure Pillsworth doesn't go to sleep. You stick by him and keep him awake while I work on the formula."

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With that the brothers parted, in pursuit of their individual duties. Cecil returned Toffee to her chair and her chains. Toffee told Marc about the truth serum and the formula.

"Oh, Lord!" Marc said. "They'll destroy the city!"

"I know," Toffee said. "I know."

After that the hours wore on endlessly. Cecil busied himself with Mr. Adams' machine, adjusting dials, turning knobs, throwing switches with hateful diligence. Cecil stuck to Marc and Toffee as per plan. Alternately he gave Marc food to keep him earthbound and powders to keep him awake. In between times, he talked. He explained about the bomb shell that he and Cecil had completed during the night while Marc was unconscious.

A small chamber was to contain the final chemical. Through a device to be set when the bomb was launched, the chemical would be released into another small chamber which was adjacent to the main body of the bomb and separated from it only by a very thin metal diaphragm. In a predetermined period of time the diaphragm would be eaten away by chemical reaction. In that way all the chemicals would be united at precisely the right moment to produce the explosion.

The moment of detonation was to be timed so that it occurred in the air directly above the target. The chemicals would be scattered in a fine spray over the desired area. It was all very precise and exact.

"An old plan we stole a long time ago," Gerald explained modestly. "We were just kids then."

Toffee glanced around to see what George was up to.

THE GHOST had been curiously quiet all day. Occasionally he had wandered over to the catapult and observed it with quiet speculation, then returned to watch Cecil at his chores. Through it all, though, he had kept a careful eye on Marc and Toffee and Gerald. He seemed to have something on his mind.

It wasn't until early evening when he came over to join the group. With the air of a kibitzer he strolled to a position behind Gerald. He stood there for a moment or two, teetering nonchalantly on the balls of his feet, then reached out and touched Gerald on the shoulder.

"I think Cecil needs your help, old man," he smiled. "He's getting ready to stuff the bomb."

"Stuff it?" Gerald asked.

"Well, whatever it is."

"I can't leave," Cecil said. "He told me to stick here."

"I'll stick in your place," George offered. "I'll be positively gluey."

Gerald hesitated, but not for long. "Well," he said finally, "all right." He got up and disappeared through the forest of apparatus.

Toffee favored George with a scathing look. "Have a seat, Judas," she said. "I only wish it were wired."

"You misjudge me," George said, sitting down. "I'm trying to help you."

"Pass the salt," Toffee said.

"I'm hurt that you take that attitude," George said. "You don't really believe that I'm so depraved as to let those two destroy the whole city?"

"I haven't heard you screaming for help," Toffee said.

"I've been waiting for the right moment," George said. "When their attention would be on the bomb and not us. Right now they think they've got everything they want, and..."

"They have got everything they want," Marc said futilely. "Do you know what they're planning to use for a test target?"

"Oh, that," George said. "Just the

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Whittle monument."

"The Whittle monument!" Marc said. "It's a landmark!"

"I think they're doing a public service getting rid of it," George said. "With that fat politician standing on top and all."

"But it'll cause a panic!" Marc said. "It may start all kinds of trouble. We've got to stop them."

"I'm afraid we can't," George said. "The bomb is almost ready now and it's dark. They're waiting to catch the after theatre crowd with this demonstration. They figure there'll be more of the international set in that group."

"The dirty little opportunists," Toffee said.

"Anyway," George said, "we can stop them bombing the city tomorrow night."

"Tomorrow night!" Marc gasped.

"That's what they're planning. If this test works out."

"Dear God! We've got to stop them!"

"Exactly," George smiled. "That's why I'm here to turn you two loose."

"Beautiful George!" Toffee cried. "Hurry!"

"Let me tell you my plan first," George said. "I'll unchain you, but you've got to promise to do as I say."

"Anything, George, darling," Toffee said.

"Very well. The door is locked, as you know, and Gerald has the key with him, so you can't get out that way. The only other way out is through the catapult openings. Gerald and Cecil will be working by the small one, so you'll have to climb up the large one and get out on the roof. I'll go over and get everything ready..." He paused to eye Marc excitedly.

"Now, wait a min...!" Marc began.

BUT TOFFEE caught his eye with a glance. "Why that's wonderful, George," she said. "Hadn't we better get started?"

"Okay," George said eagerly. He got up and began working at Toffee's chains. "I knew you'd like the idea."

"But are you sure...?" Marc said.

"We love it," Toffee put in quickly. "I'm sorry I've misjudged you."

"That's all right," George said, releasing Marc's chains. "Now, you stay here, and I'll be right back." He disappeared in the direction of the catapult.

"What's the matter with you?" Marc asked. "Dont you realize that fiend is getting ready to shoot us off into eternity?"

"Yes, I know," Toffee said. "But we don't have to wait for him to do it, do we? We're free now. Let's get moving."

"But we haven't the key to the door. And that's the only way out."

"I know," Toffee said. "We've got to work fast. Come on."

Already she was moving toward the scaffolding, looking for something. Presently her eyes fell on a small length of pipe. She picked it up and brought it to Marc.

"I can't unlock the door with that," Marc said.

"Yes, you can," Toffee said. "Hang onto it."

"What am I supposed to do with it?"

"You'll know when the time comes," Toffee said. "Quickly! Get back in the shadows." Then suddenly she began to scream at the top of her lungs.

"Marc!" she wailed. "You're floating again! Catch my hand!"

Marc jumped back into the shadows completely by surprise. And not a moment too soon.

Instantly there was the sound of

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running footsteps and Gerald appeared around the edge of the scaffolding. He stopped, looked at Toffee, then glanced apprehensively upward. It was then, true to Toffee's promise, that Marc knew what to do with the pipe. Stepping forward, he placed it firmly on the back of Gerald's skull. With a small cry of surprise, the little man dropped to the floor. Quickly Toffee bent over him, put her hand in his pocket and brought out a key.

"Thank heavens we got the right one," she breathed. "Hurry!"

She and Marc sped for the door, dodging swiftly through the tangle of apparatus as they ran. Behind them there was the sound of running, exclamations.

Toffee reached the door first and quickly thrust the key into the lock. Marc joined her and helped her unlock the door and shove it open. They darted across the veranda, down the creaking steps, and out into the night.

"Stop!" they heard Cecil yell behind them. "Come back!"

They didn't stop running until they had come to the end of the drive and onto the tree-lined lane. And then they paused only momentarily, to get their breath. Then they started forward again as they saw an ancient car, some distance away, pull up at the side of the road and park.

DALMER BOYDE, a pimpled youth of negligible sophistication, switched off the ignition, leaned back, and glanced covetously at the voluminous charms of Floramae Davis. Inwardly he experienced a certain jolting sensation. Haltingly he reached out and placed an arm against the back of Floramae's neck in a sort of amorous strangle hold.

"Floramae," Dalmer said with passionate overtones, "I think you're just every bit as pretty as a striped snake."

Floramae started in her seat with a jump that rocked the ancient auto to its very tires. Stout of heart in the face of bulls, bison or buffoons, the poor girl had one fatal fear which she could not control; she had such an abhorrence of snakes that even the mention of the word set her great frame atremble with panic.

"Snake!" she screamed. "Where?"

"There ain't no snake," Dalmer said. "I only said you was pretty."

"What a lousy time for compliments!" Floramae shrieked. "Here's this damned snake snapping at us, and you make sweet talk! You got no brains? Kill that snake and be snappy!"

Dalmer struggled to renew his grasp on the quivering girl. "I only try to say something nice and all of a sudden the place is full of snakes. Fer gosh sakes, Floramae!"

"There's more than one?" Floramae screamed. "Let go of me! Let me outa here!" She threw the door open and prepared to heave herself to the road. "What a fierce thing to do to a girl, Dalmer Boyde! Bringin' snakes on a date. It'll serve you good and right if I faint right here in the road and get squashed by a truck!"

"Aw, Floramae!" Dalmer pleaded. "Don't act so crazy about nothin'."

"You call it nothin'?" Floramae demanded to know. "I call it a dirty trick! If you ever dast to speak to me again I'll bite you!"

"Floramae!" Dalmer said.

But Floramae was on her way. Jumping from the car, she landed solidly in the center of the road. She started forward, then stopped as two figures, a man and a woman, loomed vaguely before her in the night. It was Marc and Toffee.

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"Help!" Toffee cried, running forward. "Give us a lift!" She started toward the car, but was suddenly stopped by Floramae.

"Don't get in that car, honey!" she cried. "It's spillin' over with snakes!"

But just at this moment Dalmer came bounding out of the car.

"Now, Floramae...!"

"Git away from me, Dalmer," Floramae growled, "or I'll kick you in the stomach!"

She started off rapidly down the road with Dalmer following plaintively in her wake. In the next moment the pair had disappeared into the night, and Marc and Toffee were alone with the car.

"Come on," Toffee said. "You drive." Then she glanced back toward the lane from which they had just come. Headlights stabbed around the bend and started toward them. "Hurry!" She got in the car. Marc followed after, started the car, and maneouvered it onto the road.

"Can't you make it go any faster?" Toffee asked. She looked around. "They'll be here in a minute!"

Marc pressed the gas pedal to the floor. The car coughed daintily and continued at a steady speed of twenty five.

"For the love of heaven!" he cried. "That's its limit!"

It was then that a shot suddenly echoed through the night, and the old car skidded across the road to a forced stop against an embankment. Toffee looked back at the approaching lights.

"Come on!" she cried. "Run!"

They scrambled out of the car and started up the embankment. They were just about to the top when they were suddenly caught in the blinding glare of a spotlight. They stopped where they were. On the road there was a squeal of brakes and the slam of a door. Cecil Blemish, his gun in his hand, stepped into the light.

"Fun's over," he said. "Let's go home."

TOFFEE and Marc reentered the house with an air of morose finality. As they automatically took their places in the chairs and allowed themselves to be imprisoned again, Gerald appeared smirkingly from the tangled underpinnings of the small catapult. He regarded them with an air of almost personal triumph.

"Glad you got back for the launching," he said. "You're just in time."

Marc glanced fearfully toward the catapult.

"Listen," he said earnestly. "You don't realize what you're doing. The disappearance of that monument could easily start another war. Such small things can sometimes."

The brothers stared at him with rapt attention. For a moment Marc thought he had actually begun to impress them. Then Gerald turned to Cecil.

"Just think, Cecil!" he simpered. "Another war! We'd be in great demand as spies! Do you think it's too much to hope for?"

Cecil shook his head. "Certainly not. Now that I stop to think about it, if this bomb doesn't do it, the one tomorrow night is sure to."

"Let's fire the bomb!" Gerald cried. "Right now!"

But Cecil hung back for a moment. "What's happened to that traitorous spook?" he asked.

Gerald shrugged. "Dematerialized so we couldn't tell him to his face what we think of him. He's drifting about somewhere. Anyway, forget about him. Let's launch the bomb."

The two hurried off to the catapult. There, they argued briefly about which of them would officiate at the switch,

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but finally Cecil won the honor by drawing his gun on his brother. He stepped up to the switch and took hold of it. A thick silence of mixed expectancy took the old house.

"No...no..." Marc whispered, then watched with haunted eyes as Cecil's hand brought the switch suddenly downward.

There was a loud hissing sound and then an indistinguishable flash as the bomb shot up the track and out into the night. After that the silence returned, but with a new quality now. After a long interval, Marc and Toffee started in their chairs as a distant rumble echoed back from the night.

Marc closed his eyes and waited for the old house to stop trembling...

CHAPTER XIII

LORD ASQUITH gazed out across Whittle Square and sighed an impeccable sigh that brought a new thinness to his lips, a greater flare to his aristocratic nostrils. It was evident that his Lordship had recently been in attendance of something quite odorous.

"I have never witnessed anything so abysmal," he told Lady Asquith with dry authority. "That play has as much chance for a prolonged engagement as...as..." He flicked his case at the Whittle monument and its bronzed tenant at the top. "...as that chap up there has of flying to the moon. Even Sir Lawrence couldn't have saved it."

"Quite," Lady Asquith affirmed. "I'd rather be struck dead than attend another of these wretched American productions. May the fates deliver me."

At that very moment there was a deafening roar, as all the world seemed to explode before them. The night suddenly burned with a sullen light, and the pavement beneath their feet shuddered. In the trembling silence that followed, Lady Asquith, under the terrifying impression that the fates were doing their best to oblige her in her wish to be separated from the American theatre, emitted a small cry and promptly fell into a swoon at her husband's feet. Lord Asquith gazed down at his fallen lady with sad perplexity.

"Oh, dear!" he said. Then he shrugged. "But I suppose you really did bring it on yourself, old girl." Then suddenly struck with a horrifying thought, he glanced quickly in the direction of the monument in the square. He started back with a cough of horror.

"Lord above!" he cried.

Across the square, though the night elsewhere was starkly clear, the monument had become engulfed in a heavy mist. Even as Lord Asquith watched, the fog seemed to disappear, but in a most peculiar manner. It was as though the vapors were being absorbed into the marble of the monument itself. And then, staggeringly, the entire structure began almost imperceptibly to rise.

"Gad!" his lordship gasped. "The old bloater's setting sail!" He removed his glasses and wiped them quickly. "And taking his monument with him! Coo!" He started sharply as a hand fell to his arm.

"Hallo!"

He whirled about to find a pallid-eyed, slightly vaporish little man staring down at Lady Asquith with baffled concern.

"She just resting?" he inquired thickly, "or did somebody hit her?"

His lordship glanced down at his wife. "She's been struck dead by the fates," he explained pleasantly. "She rather asked for it, you know."

The small man gazed on Lord Asquith with beaming admiration.

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"That's what I like about you English," he said. "You cover your emotions so well. How do you do it?"

But Lord Asquith didn't answer. Suddenly he was too busy giving vent to an emotion that wasn't even thinly veiled, let alone covered. As he caught sight of the monument pulling away from the earth and bobbing upward like a cork in water, he reached to the street lamp for support.

"Look at that thing leap about!" he gasped.

The little man looked and joined his lordship at the lamp.

"Gord!" he groaned, closing his eyes tightly. "I've had a snootfull in my day, but never anything like this!"

BY THIS TIME, others along the street had begun to recover sufficiently from the shock of the explosion to notice that something terribly strange was going on in the vicinity of the Whittle monument. A chorused cry of stunned surprise moved, in chain reaction, along the street and rose to a babble of hysteria.

In this rising tide of excitement, a taxi driver, unaware that he had gotten himself caught in anything more than an after theatre jam, directed his vehicle into the square, proceeded to the center, then glanced out the window to signal for a turn around the monument. He glanced, looked away, then glanced again. He shoved the whole upper portion of his body out the window and stared with blinking incredulity at the rising monument. He forgot completely about the taxi and the lady passenger in the back.

A greater scream rose through the crowd as the taxi toured complacently across the square, over the sidewalk, and lodged itself crashingly in the aquarium fitted window of a seafood restaurant. The driver remained oblivious to all but the uprooted monument, even as the windshield gave way before a deluge of salt water and flopping fish. Not so, however, his passenger who suddenly found herself staring nose to nose with a gimlet-eyed mackerel, who was peering up at her rather evilly from inside the front of her dress.

With a scream that echoed to the very heavens, the lady hurled back the door of the taxi and leaped to the sidewalk. There, before an enchanted group of onlookers, she began to clutch at herself with all the mad frenzy of a native dancer engaged in ceremonial rites dedicated to the god of human fertility. Reaching low within her dress, she withdrew the floundering fish and hurled it from her with a vengeance.

The fish looped high through the air and landed neatly on the thin chest of the still unconscious Lady Asquith. Her ladyship, however, had apparently been lying at her husband's feet, just waiting for a fish to take to her bosom. No sooner did the mackerel arrive, than she made a small whimpering sound and sat up. The fish dropped soggily to her lap. Her ladyship looked down at the fish, and it in turn looked up at her. Then with an exchange of horrified shudders, fish and lady simultaneously flopped over to their sides and lay inert.

Through the babbling crowd, two officers arrived on the scene in a manner of great haste. Running to the front of the crowd, they stopped, observed the rising monument with a start, and exchanged looks of complete confusion.

"Lord a'mighty!" the first cop exclaimed. "The thing's gone and pulled itself up by the roots!"

"I can't look," the second cop said,

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turning away. "It fair makes my skin crawl!"

"What can we do? We ought to take steps."

"There's a good idea," the second cop said fervently. "Let's get out of here. Let's run!"

"In front of all these people?"

"We could pretend we were after somebody, and just happened by this way."

The first cop nodded. "That's what we'll do! Draw your gun!"

Assuming expressions of great heroism, the two drew their pistols and brandished them frantically over their heads.

"Stop thief!" they yelled in chorus, and ran frantically through the crowd and away into the night.

AND SO, the sensational affair of the Whittle monument found its beginnings. An hour later, the news had traveled to the far corners of the earth. Teletypes rattled, and cables hummed. The nation's thinkers quitted their beds in the early hours of the morning to apprise the land of their thoughts on the matter.

The morning paper, which Gerald brought back to the old house from a nearby village, presented a fair cross section of world opinion on the incident. Only Russia had no thoughts to vouchsafe on the question of buoyant monuments.

"There is more to this matter than the mere loss of a valued landmark," Gerald read aloud. "This may be the insult direct to every red blooded American, the final jab at his pride and sense of independence. For a long time our enemies have done everything possible to discredit our American heroes, and it would appear now that they are even willing to go to the extreme of removing their monuments. That they have chosen to employ a hideous secret weapon to accomplish this monstrous end, clearly indicates an intention to spread fear and panic throughout the nation. When the UN meets tomorrow..."

"You see?" Marc said unhappily. "You see? This thing could easily touch off a war. You fools!"

Gerald's smile, as he put down the paper, was mindful of an actor reading his notices after a successful opening night.

"We've done it at last!" he sighed.

"I always knew we would," Cecil said complacently. "Wait 'til tonight."

Ecstatically the two got up and left, intent on the preparations for the coming disaster.

"Those two haven't got a decent impulse to split between them," Toffee said.

"And I invented this thing!" Marc said wretchedly. "I'm as guilty as if I were bombing the city myself. I wish I were dead!"

"You will be," Toffee said, "if something doesn't happen. I heard them talking last night. They've decided not to give you any food today. After they've fired the bomb, they're going to let you float off into space with everything else." She closed her eyes against the thought. "We've got to get out of here and stop this thing." She looked at Marc imploringly. "Can't you go to sleep?"

"They've been giving me all those powders."

"If only that supernatural serpent would just show himself," Toffee said. "I'm sure we could talk George into something if we just had the chance and enough time."

After that they fell silent, lost in a mood of black desolation. Outside the sky failed to produce the full promise of day; the grey dawn lin-

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gered and became a dark storm color. Gerald left his work long enough to throw the levers that closed the metal coverings over the turrets. A moment later rain could be heard splattering against them. The tangled shadows of the fantastic equipment grew darker and more formidable under the glare of the overhead worklights. Toffee looked at Marc, and for the first time the dullness of true despair was in her green eyes.

"We've got to get out of here, Marc," she said. "We've got to!"

"But how?"

"We could try to get our chains loose. Our fingers are free, at least. If we moved close enough together... We've got to try."

Marc glanced without hope at the tangles of chain that imprisoned them. "I suppose so," he murmured. Slowly, careful lest he upset himself, he began working his chair toward Toffee. Slowly he inched forward.

IT WAS nearly a half an hour before they were close enough. Marc strained his hand forward and began fumbling with the chains at Toffee's wrists. It was difficult work, but he kept at it. At the end of several minutes, however, his hands were stiff with pain, and he had to rest.

"I can't even see what I'm doing," he said.

"Let me try loosening yours while you rest," Toffee said with determination. "We'll take turns."

The hours wore on without result. There was no interruption from the Blemishes, however. The brothers were far too absorbed in their preparations for destruction to pay any attention to their captives. They did not bring food.

"I'm begining to feel hungry." Marc said.

"This is no time to think of your stomach," Toffee said.

"It's not my stomach," Marc said. "I just hope I don't start floating away from you. It could happen, you know." He glanced at her chains. "Do you feel any slack around your wrists at all?"

"Not yet," Toffee said. "Keep trying."

The rain outside continued with a steady monotony and grew louder. It was impossible to judge the passage of time. Hours dragged by, enough, it seemed, to round out several days. Toffee and Marc continued their efforts with the chains, but with a growing sense of futility.

"It's no use," Marc said. "My fingers are raw."

"We've got to keep trying," Toffee said.

Then suddenly they both were quiet as the sound of nearby yawning interrupted the stillness. It had the thoughtless, indolent tone of George about it. They turned expectant eyes toward the scaffolding.

Slowly, George faded into view, materializing himself with slow luxury. He yawned a second time and stretched his arms above his head. Then he glanced in their direction and waved with airy insolence.

"That's a clubby picture you two make," he commented. "Spending your last hours in romantic rapture."

"Louse!" Toffee said. "I'd like to see you spend yours in intolerable agony."

"How can you bear me such ill will?" George asked innocently. "Didn't I let you loose last night?"

"Stop lolling around," Toffee said, "and come down here."

"Sure," George said, and drifted blithely down to the floor. "Something on your mind?"

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"Yes," Toffee said. "Murder!"

"George!" Marc said. "You've got to help us. Regardless of your personal feelings...or lack of them...you can't..."

George shrugged with great indifference. "What difference does it make to me if they blow up the city?" he asked. "The High Council will be recalling me at any moment now. Let the city go or stay, I won't be around to see it."

"How do you kill a ghost?" Toffee murmured.

MARC GLANCED in the direction of the Blemishes. It was evident that their labors were nearly at an end. The rain was beating in a steady roar, high on the roof above them. There couldn't be too much time left. He turned decisively toward George.

"George!" he said. "I'll make you a proposition. What you want, is to get rid of me forever, isn't it? So you can stay on earth?"

"That's the idea," George admitted.

"Then listen to me," Marc said, his voice level. "You have no special liking for Cecil and Gerald, so it shouldn't matter to you if they get hurt." He cleared his throat. "If you'll just turn me loose and give me a chance to stop them, I'll let you send me off in the catapult."

"Marc!" Toffee cried. She turned to George. "Don't listen to..."

"Whether I win or lose, George," Marc said.

"You can't!" Toffee cried. "That's suicide!"

"Not exactly," Marc said. "If he doesn't finish me off, they will." He turned back to George. "You'll be sure of getting rid of me. And the city will be saved."

"Well," George hesitated. "I don't know..."

"Hurry," Marc said. "You've got to do it. They're loading the bomb right now. This is your chance to do something decent for once."

George closed his eyes thoughtfully and rocked back on his heels. There was a moment of tense silence as he swayed forward. "Okay!" he said. "It's a deal. Not that I have any particular feeling one way or another about this city of yours. Actually, I'm only doing it as a personal favor to you. After all, I can understand why you don't want to move on to the next world to make room for someone else. It takes time to get adjusted to the idea that... "

"Stop orating," Toffee put in harshly. "If you're going to let us loose, you ghoul, then do it."

"Hurry, George!" Marc said.

Happily George went about the business of releasing first Marc, and then Toffee.

"Now don't try any funny stuff," he said to Marc. "Remember you made a bargain. "

"I won't," Marc promised gravely.

"Good!" George said. "I've been dying to use that catapult anyway." He chuckled softly. "You'll die when I do. Isn't that funny?"

"Screaming," Toffee said, and followed Marc as he moved swiftly into the shadows.

They crept quietly forward to a position behind an enormous dynamo. Marc stopped and peered around. A few yards away, the Blemishes toiled with the enormous bomb, adjusting it to the catapult, getting it ready to be fired. They paused briefly in their activities.

"Is it time yet?" Gerald asked excitedly.

Cecil consulted his watch. "A quarter after eight," he said. "Just fifteen minutes to go."

"I can't wait," Gerald said.

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Toffee moved closer to Marc and put her hand on his arm.

"You aren't really going through with that deal, are you?" she asked. "With George, I mean?"

"I don't see how I can avoid it," Marc said. He nodded over his shoulder toward George, who was watching them from a close distance. "He isn't letting me out of his sight for a second. I'm so weak now from lack of sleep and food, I may not even be able to handle those two out there. Then too, if it weren't for George, we'd still be helpless."

"There must be some way out of all this," Toffee said miserably.

MARC TURNED to her for a moment, his eyes clinging worriedly to hers. "I only hate doing this to you," he said. "I know you'll go when I do, and I can't really believe you aren't completely real any more. Sometimes, I feel that I've known you for years and years."

"You have," Toffee said softly. "You have." Then, boosting herself to the tips of her toes, she reached up and kissed him lightly on the cheek. "It's all right. Do what you have to. I'll help if I can."

"I'm sorry," Marc said.

They waited a bit longer. Marc glanced around for a weapon and found the length of pipe Toffee had given him the night before. He picked it up and moved cautiously to the edge of the dynamo. The rain sounded ragingly against the metal coverings over the turrets. He watched the demented brothers until their backs were turned toward him, then sprang forward.

The moments that followed were covered with noisy confusion. At Marc's first movement, the brothers left their work with a cry of dismay. Cecil whirled about, a heavy wrench in his hand. He raised it menacingly and Marc ran toward him. Toffee ran toward Gerald, but her value as a combatant was negligible. Gerald quickly shoved her aside and, as she fell to the floor, ran to the aid of his brother. It was just as Marc raised the pipe over Cecil's head that Gerald, in a headlong dash, butted him squarely and brutally in the pit of the stomach and sent him doubling forward in a convulsion of agony. Cecil was quick to seize the opportunity to use his wrench. He swung it upward and brought it down with savage strength. But the blow was inaccurate. It missed Marc's head and crashed dully into his shoulder. With a cry of pain, Marc twisted to one side and fell to the floor. He lay inert as though the blow had paralyzed him.

Toffee, from her position, had a jumbled impression of Gerald running in another direction, toward a table upon which lay two guns. He was going to kill Marc! She jumped quickly to her feet and ran unknowingly to the switch panel on the wall. Something had to be done! She began pulling switches with frenzied swiftness. It was as her hand pressed frantically on the fourth one, that everything was suddenly plunged into blackness. For a moment she leaned against the panel, weak with relief.

There was stark silence in the old house for a brief moment, and then the darkness was filled with sound; curses, a dull dragging, the clang of equipment being tumbled over. Toffee waited breathlessly, then moved forward to the place where Marc had fallen. She felt in the darkness for him, but he wasn't there.

"Marc!" she called.

But her voice was drowned out by the sudden loud rumblings of machinery. Then a great blast of cold air swept through the building, and Tof-

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fee felt a dampness on her face. She turned and looked upward. The turret at the top of the large catapult had been opened! Even as she looked, a flash of lightning squirmed through the sky and illuminated the entire building. Toffee caught a glimpse of George, lifting Marc into the cartridge on the catapult.

"Marc!" she screamed, and ran forward.

THERE WAS also a cry from the Blemishes. But she didn't stop to listen. In the darkness she felt her way rapidly through the machinery to the base of the catapult. As another streak of lightning writhed across the sky, she saw George climbing down from the scaffolding and moving toward the switch. She reached out and grabbed wildly at his sleeve.

"Stop!" she cried. "It isn't fair!"

But George moved doggedly forward. In the darkness, Toffee knew that he was reaching toward the switch. Then, as the enormous room once again flashed with light, she looked upward toward Marc, and almost laughed with relief. Even in that small interval, she had seen his lank figure rise buoyantly above the cartridge and start inching into space.

"He's floating!" she cried triumphantly. "He's getting away!"

George suddenly brushed past her in the darkness and leaped to the scaffolding. In the next flash of light Toffee saw him climb to the top of the cartridge and grab vainly at Marc's rising coat tails. Suddenly, she knew what she had to do. She whirled about and reached for the switch, found it, and pulled with all her might.

Instantly there was a terrible sucking sound and a great flash of light. As George fell back into the cartridge, it streaked up the track of the catapult and out into the night so fast, that it seemed, a moment later, never to have been there at all. There was a beat of silence, and then, frighteningly, all the heavens seemed to tremble with an angry light. A moment later a roar of thunder rolled back across the earth and crashed deafeningly against the walls of the old house. It was as though the whole universe shook with a destructive rage.

Toffee gazed weakly toward the now darkened heavens. "Bon Voyage, George!" she murmured. Then she turned back to the darkness. "Marc!"

There was no answer, but as she waited, the beam of a flash-light knifed the darkness in the direction of the small catapult. The Blemishes, murmuring together, were back at work. Toffee crept forward until she was close enough to hear what they were saying.

"I don't care what they're up to," Cecil said. "I don't care if they all went to eternity, it's eight thirty and we're going to launch the bomb. After that, they can live or die or sit around in their stocking feet. It won't make any difference to us."

Gerald directed the beam of the flashlight up the track of the small catapult, then to the face of the turret.

"There he is!" he cried.

MARC, SPREAD eagled across the face of the metal covering, was clinging frantically to the cable that lifted the contrivance. As the light caught him, he glanced around, but made no effort to avoid discovery. He seemed curiously agitated.

"Fine!" Cecil said. "That's a good place for him. "We'll get him with the bomb. Put the light back here so I can see what I'm doing."

"That dame *would* have to blow out the lights," Gerald said sullenly.

"Never mind. We can manage. The

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bomb is all set now. You take the lever that raises the turret shelter. I'll pull the switch on the catapult. I'll give the signal and we'll pull together."

"Okay," Gerald agreed. The beam of the flash moved off at a distance, then darted upward again to illuminate Marc's activities in the turret. "I'm ready!"

"Marc!" Toffee screamed. "Get away! They're firing the bomb!"

Marc glanced back at her, but didn't move. He seemed to be pulling frantically at the cable, almost as though he had somehow gotten caught on it.

"Ready!" Cecil yelled. "Aim....!"

"Marc!" Toffee screamed. "Marc!" "Marc!"

"*Fire!*"

In the dreadful flash that followed, Toffee couldn't be certain of what she saw. It seemed that Marc had darted away from the face of the turret, but she couldn't be sure. In the same moment there was a cry of terror from Gerald.

"It didn't open!" he screamed. "He jammed the cable!"

The tracks of the catapult gleamed red with friction, and the room was lighted with a dull glow. And then Toffee saw that the metal covering had remained secure, blocking the passage of the bomb. She had only a glimpse before the crash came.

There was an awful rending as the old house groaned and screamed under the impact of the blow. The turret tore loose from its moorings on the roof, but the bomb had been deflected. The great metal cylinder looped away from the track, tore through a section of the ceiling and streaked upward into the night, traveling in a straight line. There was a breathless silence as Toffee and the brothers watched the terrible thing move into the sky directly above the house. It hovered for what seemed to be minutes, then started down again in a definite course.

"My God!" Cecil screamed. "It's coming down on top of us!" He began to run.

And then the bomb struck. The whole world glared with screaming light, and then exploded.

In that last moment, Toffee had only a brief, horrified glimpse of the lank figure, some distance above the house, soaring away into the darkness, and the rain.

The world gasped and crumbled around her....

CHAPTER XIV

A SMALL hum stirred at the back of the darkness, a glimmer of sound, like a faint ray of silver white light in an area of great stillness. Somehow sound and light had gotten themselves mixed up together, so that one was difficult to distinguish from the other. But this was sound and it had started with a humming smallness and grown shrill. It screamed in Marc's head so that he had to open his eyes to let it out.

A great brightness rushed forward, stabbing at his eyes, thrusting deep into the nerve centers at the back of his head. He blinked painfully and looked away, but the light came at him again, nervous light that moved toward him, then away, but always in the same direction, jittering along with small, irregular spurts.

Marc was aware that he was lying on his back, and there was a sharp pain in his shoulder. It didn't make sense. The last he could remember was the night drawing him upward, squeezing the breath and the life out of him. He lay back and gave himself over to the effort of breathing. And then a voice spoke close by, irritably.

"Of all the perfectly insane places to wind up, this snags the prize!"

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There was no question that the voice was Toffee's. Marc glanced around, then up. The redhead was standing over him, an evil glint in her eyes.

"Toffee!" he said.

"Of course," Toffee said. "Who'd you think? Who else would be silly enough to sit up here in this ridiculous place with you?"

"What place?" Marc asked. "Where are we?"

"What place?" Toffee said. "We're back in the city. In fact we're right smack in the center of the city." She waved a hand at the jittering lights that were still skittering along behind her. "That," she announced amusedly, "is the news sign on the face of the Dispatch building. You know, the one that has the lights that spell out words and keeps moving all the time? We're on the ledge right in front of it. And a fine spectacle we make, too, I imagine."

"My gosh!" Marc exclaimed. He sat up. Now that Toffee had told him he could see that the jittering lights did spell out letters as they moved along.

"In fact," Toffee said, "talking about being in the news, the story of the explosion is coming through right now. She turned to the sign and paused to read:

MYSTERY EXPLOSION LAYS WASTE SEVERAL MILES OF PASTURE NEAR CITY... WRECKAGE .. VEGETATION .. EVERYTHING CHANGED TO BE BUOYANT....PILLSWORTH FORMULA BELIEVED TO HAVE PROVIDED BASIC EXPLOSIVE

Then suddenly a meangless jumble of lights burst forth upon the atmosphere. It appeared that the sign had been surprised into a fit of exclamatory stuttering. Then the words began to come again.

PILLSWORTH AND UNIDENTIFIED GIRL SIGHTED HERE ON NORTH WEST LEDGE OF BUILDING...POLICE AND FIRE EQUIPMENT PREPARING RESCUE.

"Thank heavens," Toffee said. "We're not going to grow old together up here after all." She moved away from Marc and to the brink of the ledge. As Marc followed her progress he noticed for the first time that it was still night, but as his gaze moved toward the horizon he saw a growing margin of dawn.

"Golly!" Toffee said happily. "You should see all the people down there! And there are some men with a big ladder on a truck. We'll be down from here in no time at all." She patted her drooping butterflies into place. "They've got a search light on the man who's climbing up. He's terribly big. Why don't you stand up and let me lie down for a while? I'd look more helpless."

"Any time you look helpless," Marc said, "I want to see it."

"That may be," Toffee said, "but don't be surprised if I faint gracefully at the proper moment."

Marc moved closer to the ledge. "I wonder if Julie's down there?" he murmured. But even as he said it, he knew she wouldn't be.

AT THE BOTTOM of the ladder Marc and Toffee were promptly greeted by the two government men, ushered without delay to a limousine, whisked across the city to a large grey building, and taken to an office with large comfortable furniture and soundproofed walls. While a male secretary wrote it all down, Marc and Toffee tiredly narrated their experiences at the hands of the Blemishes.

"It was dreadful," Toffee said, eyeing the secretary. "I feel faint."

The more talkative of the two gov-

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ernment men told them the rest of the story from where they left off.

"There wasn't anything left by the time we got there," he said. "Even the grass was uprooting itself out of the ground and drifting up into space. There was no sign of the Blemish brothers, of course. Definitely criminally insane!"

Marc gazed out the window at the city stretching up around them, and was taken with a tremor of horror.

"There's just one thing puzzling me, Mr. Pillsworth," the government man said. "How is it that you returned to earth? Will all the debris finally return to earth in a few days?"

Marc gazed at them blankly. He had been wondering the same thing himself. He passed a trembling hand over his eyes and shook his head.

"I know," Toffee said mildly. All eyes turned curiously in her direction. She smiled blandly. "You see," she said, charmed with the idea of having so much male attention all at once, "you see, being rather a creature of nature.....but I don't suppose you gentlemen would understand that.... just let it go that I have a special understanding of natural causes and effects that do not occur in the ordinary human being." She nodded toward Marc. "It was the double dosage that brought him back. The original treatment made him give off the impulses which caused him to be buoyant, but the second one, instead of increasing his buoyancy, merely counteracted it. It was a matter of a war between impulses of equal strength and pull. The ones moving outward were met by the ones forcing their way inward. It was what might be called a condition of impasse. Eventually, the two exhausted each other, and so he returned to earth." She smiled beguilingly. "Is that all perfectly clear?"

The government man whistled shrilly and glanced at the ceiling. "If you say so," he muttered.

"Of course," Toffee went on, "the thing that really saved his life was the fact that, in being buoyant, he drifted far enough away from the explosion so that the impulses that reached him were in exact proportion to those he was giving off. It wouldn't happen again in a million years."

THE GOVERNMENT man gazed at her from the corner of his eyes. "No," he said. "I'm sure it wouldn't." He turned to the secretary. "I hope you got all that on paper."

The young man shook his head. "I was too fascinated," he said. Even as he spoke, his eyes did not leave Toffee's well crossed leg.

The government man cleared his throat.

"Well, anyway, everything is all right now," he said.

He turned to Marc, who was showing increasing evidence of complete collapse. "I hate to do this," he said, "but I'm afraid we'll have to ask you for another favor. This incident, along with the one of the monument and all the attention in the newspapers, has caused a national panic. The people are threatening to do all sorts of things. There have already been several suicides. Anyway, we have to reassure the public at large that your formula is in our hands and safe. The best way to do this, we've decided, is in a public presentation; if the people can see you handing your formula over to us with their own eyes, then they'll have to believe it. It's not the orthodox procedure in such matters, of course, but this is an extreme situation and calls for extreme measures.

"Anyway, we'd like you to go with us to the stadium this afternoon and

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publicly present your formula to the chief. Every precaution will be taken and you'll have the very best of protection. Will you do it?"

Marc, too far gone for words, merely nodded. He could hold off sleep no longer.

"Fine!" the government man said, and got up. The others followed. "Then we'll leave you here to rest and will call for you at four o'clock. And, you, young lady....?"

The man stopped, stared, turned to his companions. "Where did she go?" he asked in a whisper. "What happened to her?"

"Gosh, I don't know," the secretary said. "But I wish she'd taken me along!"

In hushed bewilderment the men went to the door and quietly left the room. After they had gone, there was only the sound of Marc's exhausted breathing which bore the promise of a good healthy snore.

FOR A LONG time Marc lay immersed in the unbroken blackness of complete sleep. And then the darkness lifted, gradually, and a soft light began to glow around him. He gazed up at a sky of unbroken blue, and somehow his spirit lightened. He sat up and looked around. He knew instantly, by the gentle misted slopes and the strange trees, that he had returned to the valley of his mind. He looked around expectantly.

It happened just as he had known it would, on the nearest rise. The mists swirled aside and a shapely leg appeared, leading quickly after it another of its kind and a perfectly formed body. Toffee smiled as she ran toward him.

"I knew you'd turn up sooner or later, you old wretch!" she cried happily. She dropped to the grass beside him. Marc noticed that she once more was wearing the negligible green tunic that she'd had on the first time he'd dreamed of her.

"I wonder how I got back here," Marc said.

"Who cares?" Toffee said happily. "Let's take advantage of it. What's more private than your own thoughts?"

"Now, just a second....."

"Still the same old prude," Toffee said. Then she giggled. "We certainly took the four bit tour through the mill, didn't we?"

"I don't like to think about it," Marc said grimly. "I wish it hadn't happened."

"Nonsense," Toffee said. "You needed trouble and a good adventure. That's what was wrong with you and your life. That's why you dreamed me up. A good upheaval does anybody a lot of good. Even a bottle of medicine has to have a good shaking to be worth anything. That's why it all happened."

"I wonder about Julie," Marc said darkly. "I wonder if she's....?"

"Wait and see," Toffee said. "Don't rush things." A reminiscent look came into her eyes as she gazed off into the distance across the valley. Suddenly she was taken with a fit of laughter.

"What is it?" Marc asked.

"George," Toffee said. "I wonder where he is now." She began to laugh again. "I had a glimpse of his face just before he took off. He was the most surprised ghost that ever moaned at midnight."

"Poor George," Marc said. "I suppose he didn't have a very good time of it. But then neither did any of the rest of us."

"Oh, well," Toffee said. "All that's over with now." She shifted closer to Marc. "Let's get down to the impor-

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tant stuff."

"Hey! Wait a min.....?" Marc cried.

But too late. Toffee had already twined her arms about his neck and was kissing him. Finally, she let him go.

"You never change, do you?" Marc said shortly.

"Never," Toffee said. "Isn't it delightful? I know a game that's fun. We take turns..."

"No!" Marc said. "No games!"

"Well, all right," Toffee sighed. "Then I guess we'll just have to go on necking." She made a second dive at him.

"Help!" Marc yelled. "Help!"

Then suddenly both of them froze where they were. The valley had begun to tremble and the darkness was descending rapidly.

"You'll have to go now," Toffee said.

"I know," Marc said. For a moment he just looked at her, hesitant. Then quickly, he leaned forward and kissed her lightly on the lips.

"Thanks," he said. "Thanks for everything."

Toffee smiled gently. "Oh, hell," she said grandly, "that's all right. Just call on me any time."

"Goodbye," Marc said, almost wistfully. "Goodbye, Toffee!"

"So long," Toffee whispered. "Happy landings."

And the little valley fell into darkness.

MARC OPENED his eyes, fighting the pressure of sleep that still weighted his consciousness. The government man's face, like an affidavit of official duty, appeared over him. Marc struggled to a sitting position and tried to shake the sleep out of his mind with a toss of his head.

"When we were driving over, you asked me to find out about your wife," the man said.

Marc nodded hopefully.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Pillsworth. We haven't been able to reach her. Either here or in Reno. They're still trying, however, and they'll locate her before long, I'm certain." He glanced at his watch. "It's three forty five; we'd better be going to the stadium.

Wearily, Marc got to his feet. He dreaded the affair at the stadium; there was nothing he wanted to do more than start out looking for Julie. Even as tired as he was. It didn't matter where or how, just so long as he was looking for her.....doing something to find her.....

"We'd better go," the man said uneasily.

Marc sighed and followed him to the door.

* * *

Entering into the center of the stadium, Marc glanced cursorily at the wave upon wave of faces that rippled down the sides of the bleachers. He walked in the center of a group of silent, armed men, the government man at his side. Planes droned overhead, providing a protective barricade, even in the sky. They walked to a platform in the center of the field and mounted it. The government man led him to a seat and then took his place beside him. Marc glanced around.

The platform was fairly bulging with important persons, politically speaking. Every faction and party had apparently done its utmost to get into the act. Most of the men sat in solemn silence, as though in attendance at a funeral. Marc guessed that this was to impress the gathering public with the immense gravity of the occasion. When a band played the anthem, Marc could barely get to his feet, but he managed

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it with a great effort.

"This won't take too long," the man from the government whispered as they sat down again. "The President was delayed in arriving, so the Chief will say a few words of explanation, and then you step forward and hand him the formula. You can leave after that if you like."

Marc nodded. It did take too long; the Chief turned out to be a large thick-necked man with a ruddy face and unlimited lung power. He explained about the formula and its power, and assured everyone that it was not in foreign hands and that the two persons who had seen it, besides the inventor, of course, had destroyed themselves in its use. The rest was largely political. Everyone yawned quietly, with the possible exception of the Chief's wife.

Marc turned his thoughts toward the sky and a cloud that drifted lazily overhead. It was natural enough that his thoughts turned briefly to George, and the fate of that erstwhile haunt. He gazed far into the heavens, though it was difficult to think of George in the upper regions, even though he had been headed in that direction when last seen. Marc could not imagine to what kind of place in the universe George had returned.

FAR BEYOND the cloud that Marc watched, George sat rigidly upright on a hard piece of atmosphere and shifted uneasily. He glanced at the entity next to him and grinned wryly.

"I'm glad I don't have to go in first," he said glumly.

"What are you up for?" the other entity asked. "When you get to the supreme Council it must be bad."

"Disorderly conduct," George said, "and attempt at falsifying the fate of a mortal down on Earth."

"That's bad," the other said.

"Yeah," George said, "but what gets me down is how they recalled me. They planned it all without letting me know. I tell you it was a nasty jolt to my nervous system when I found out that damned catapult had been aimed right smack at the chambers of the High Council. They probably will banish me to hard labor on one of the planets. You know, digging out those craters for the mortals to stare at through their silly spy glasses. It was a terrible shock."

"How was it on earth?" The other shifted eagerly.

"Well..." George answered, and a reminiscent look came into his eyes, "there was this little redhead, see ..." He smiled s e c r e t l y, and gazed off into the distance. "I guess," he continued, as though to himself, "on the whole, I'd say it was worth it..."

* * *

"Mr. Pillsworth!"

Marc awoke from his reverie and turned around. The government man had taken hold of his sleeve.

"Now you give him your formula."

Marc glanced quickly toward the podium where the Chief was staring back at him expectantly. Stiffly, he rose from his chair and moved forward.

The Chief turned back to the audience.

"Ladies and Gentlemen!" he announced dramatically. "The Pillsworth Formula!"

Suddenly the heavens echoed with a cry from several thousand throats that was almost terrifying in its magnitude. Marc reached into his inside coat pocket, felt for the little black book and found it. Quickly he slipped the pen clasp free and withdrew the book. Then, strangely, he hesitated.

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Suddenly he wondered if this was the right thing to do. At any rate, it was much too late now. The sooner he handed over the formula, the sooner he could leave and start looking for Julie. He drew his hand from inside his coat and held the book out to the Chief.

IT WAS THEN that the whole affair took on a new and more sensational aspect than even the politicians on the platform had dared hope for. The Chief in reaching out for the book, neglected to extend his hand far enough, and Marc, thinking that he had taken hold of it, let go of it. Suddenly the book began to fall. But only for an instant. Describing a small loop in mid air, it only started down, before it shot upward. Before anyone realized, or even believed, for that matter, what was happening, the little book had risen high beyond the Chief's grasp and gone soaring rapidly toward the heavens. The cry in the thousands of throats became a gasp of horror.

Marc stood dumbly staring at the black dot in the sky, as it grew smaller and smaller, even in the space of a heart beat. He felt awful in the first moment, and then, all at once, he was assailed with a feeling of great relief. Suddenly, he realized that exactly the right thing had happened to the book and the terrible formula. Smilingly, he turned and looked at the disgruntled expressions about him. The Chief was swiftly turning a lovely green color.

At once Marc realized that he had no further business with these people, or they with him. The world had suddenly become a much brighter and simpler place to live in. Without a word, he turned, walked down the steps of the platform and started across the field toward the exit.

It was just as he neared the exit that the first cheer went up in the stands, and before he got to it, the stadium was screaming from end to end. There was no question that the disposal of the formula had been a great relief to everyone. Marc turned, smiled his agreement to the crowd, and disappeared beneath the stands. Just as he started into the shadows, he saw the figure waiting at the outer doorway.

"Julie!" he cried.

She ran toward him, and there were tears in her eyes. Even before she reached him she had begun to talk.

"I was on my way to Reno," she sobbed. "I felt so awful I didn't look at the papers or listen to the radio.... and then I saw a newspaper in the dining car...with your picture on it...I thought I'd go out of my mind ...I left the train...but there weren't any planes because of the weather... and...and...I just got back..."

Marc just stood staring at her, too happy, too warm inside to speak.

"Please forgive me," Julie said. "I'll give up the clubs...and...and everything... You won't have to spend your time in the basement...I'll even forget about the redhead, if you'll just take me back...I thought you were dead!...You will take me back, won't you? Please Marc!"

Marc nodded dumbly.

"Oh, thank you, darling!" Julie smiled. "Thank you!"

Marc took her in his arms and drew her close to him.

"Oh, hell," he grinned, "that's all right. Just call on me any..."

Then suddenly he stopped. He wondered vaguely if he hadn't heard someone else say that before...

THE END

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MIND OVER MATTER

★ By CARTER T. WAINWRIGHT ★

SOME AMAZING biological potentialities have been suggested by recent work done at the Illinois Institute of Technology. The dramatic implications of this announcement suggest that medical men are going to have to revise a number of cherished opinions.

Scientists there have performed an unusual biological experiment. They have severed—completely—the spinal cords of a number of small kittens. This converts the animals into the equivalent of human paraplegics, those unfortunate individuals who, through severed spinal columns, are paralyzed from the waist down.

Then the scientists by an elaborate program of electrical stimulation, by hand stimulation, by massage, by exercise, *teach* the kittens to walk normally once again!

After several months of this extremely detailed training, the kittens learn to operate their hindquarters in a perfectly natural fashion *even though there is no nerve connection with the brain.*

The only possible explanation for this extraordinary result is that a group of nerve cells in the lower region of the spine behave something like a "second brain." While this suggestion is rather striking, it has a theoretical precedent. You may recall that scientists believe that certain very huge prehistoric dinosaurs whose physical length was measured in scores of feet, required a subsidiary brain, a second brain to enable it to operate. Nerve impulses from the tiny brain in the head were not enough!

The results of the work with the paraplegic kittens implies some tremendous consequences which we may only hint at. Naturally these are a long way off since these experiments are the first of their kind.

But it may mean that such techniques are applicable to humans. There are many paraplegics condemned to wheel chairs because of the injuries to the spinal cord. Perhaps by suitable treatment such people may be taught to use their lower limbs.

In the training films of the kittens, taken while they were learning to function once more, it is interesting to observe the gradual improvement in their carriage. First you see awkward stumbling walking with the rear quarters all but dragging. Eventually, the rear quarters are moved gracefully, a bit stiffly but in accordance with the commands of this rudimentary "second brain"!

★ ★ ★

EYELID SECRETS

★ By L. A. BURT ★

A BRITISH physicist has announced an interesting discovery. By careful observation he has learned that human beings go to sleep in a little more than one second! Many people have believed that they gradually doze off into unconsciousness when they go to sleep. This is not true. When sleep comes, it comes fast—in one and six-tenths of a second to be exact.

The way in which he learned this is most interesting. While taking a train journey he sat opposite a sleepy couple who were continually dozing. It came to his attention that their eyelids were a clue to the state of consciousness. *When they were asleep their eyelids did not flutter.* When they were awake their eyelids fluttered at a definite rate.

Subsequent investigation disclosed that this fluttering is characteristic of everyone. It is impossible for a person to really feign sleep for the simple reason that one's eyelids will flutter involuntarily at a pretty constant rate. This is true whether the eyes are open or closed. Men blink at the rate of about once every two seconds; women at the rate of once every one and a half seconds.

ATOMIC GHOST

★ By JON BARRY ★

ATOMIC physics is threaded through with a spirit which refuses to be laid in its grave. It is something which has long needed a solution. Apparently that time is at hand.

In order to simplify many atomic problems, in order to eliminate the ponderous mathematical intricacies, scientists assume that the weight and size of atomic particles are concentrated in a point, a single mathematical point without dimensions. This is mathematically extremely convenient. But it is a thing which produces the horrible ghost.

That ghost is the fact that when the mathematical simplification is allowed, problems take on infinite mass and infinite speeds, both of which are patent absurdities. Infinity, that horrible concept of mathematics, then creeps about through physics. Physicists have longed to get rid of it. Yukawa, the Japanese physicists who recently received the Nobel prize for his work on the positron, has resolved the dilemma in a series of pages packed with abstruse mathematical symbology.

While it is intelligible only to another physicist, the theory has profound implications and may mean a great deal.

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OPERATION DECOY

By Walt Sheldon

As the enemy officer threw the switch, a loud hum filled the room and the man in the chair lapsed into a state of unconsciousness . . .

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His mission was to deliver an urgent order to his Fleet Commander. The trouble was, the enemy had given him the message!

SYSTEM Defense Department Visaphone Transcript, 9 January, 3150
COMSUPREME to COMSIGNAL

SUPREME: Hello, Rad. Listen, I haven't much time so I won't bother to ask you how things are in Newmex, and so forth. I'll get right to the point.

SIGNAL: Of course, sir.

SUPREME: Rad, the enemy's been intercepting our messages entirely too frequently. I know you've been doing the best you can—but it isn't enough. I can't send anything to my sector commanders any more and be as much as fifty percent sure they'll get it exclusively. Even the couriers have been getting intercepted.

SIGNAL: Yes, sir. I've been thinking about that, and I've got an—

SUPREME: Don't interrupt, Rad.

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Now, listen. I want an entirely new method of transmission. I want you to *think,* like you've never thought before. Doesn't matter if they catch on to it eventually; I just want to be nearly one hundred percent certain of getting one particular message through.

SIGNAL: Sir, I figured you'd call about this, and so I've already—

SUPREME: Wait till I'm through Rad. I've a good chance to end this thing once and for all. I've been up all night with the position computer—the Chesser, I think the junior officers call it. I've checked and checked and it always gives the same answer. If I can move Bisley's Fourth Fleet from Hutton 23 to Hutton 109 I'll have the Medeans completely trapped. They'll have to capitulate. I hope fervently, Rad, that it will mean the last of these interstellar wars.

SIGNAL: Of course, sir. Bisley and I talked about a situation such as this last time he was on Terra, and—

SUPREME: Now get this, Rad. If the Medeans learn where the Fourth Fleet is going, they can countermove, and we're right back where we started. The Chesser hasn't shown us a chance like this in years, though. We've *got* to make it good. *We've got to get the proper movement order—unintercepted—through to Bisley with the Fourth Fleet. Somehow.*

SIGNAL: Sir, I've already taken steps to—

SUPREME: That's all, Rad. Got other things to do, now. Try to work that surefire signal method out in seventy-two hours. The way you used to cram for that old three-point-oh at the Point. See you later.

(BLANK OFF)

SYSTEM Defense Department
Magnetape Communication
COMPERSON to COMSIGNAL

Transmitted herewith personal record, Form 66-1, selected from punch card file per your requirements. Name: Frank Jonathan. Rank: Captain. Rating: Space Pilot. Age: Twenty-eight. Intelligence Quotient: 130. *Emotional Index: Middle-low. Pain Threshold:* 12.5 *Morton Units. Civil Status: Married....*

* * *

OFFICER'S CLUB, NEWMEX SPACE BASE
10 January, 3150

Hello Darling!

Forgive my writing this old fashioned letter, but somehow I wanted to do it this way, and anyway all the magnetapes around here are being used by other guys, talking to their wives, probably, but I'll bet none as pretty as one Mrs. Frank Jonathan.

Well, as you probably know if you've opened this by now, I've been doing things. I've left instructions for this letter to be mailed in case (a) my mission is completed successfully (b) I'm reported missing, or something, and (c) the worst happens. And how I wish I could Viz you before I go—see you and talk to you! But Comsignal says no, the heartless old buzzard; until blast-off I am strictly what is known as incommunicado.

But I guess I better start at the beginning. To start, there I am minding my own business training future spacebugs out in Losan, California, when this very hush-hush summons comes through and a couple of cloak-and-dagger boys whisk me in a jet to Newmex. I'm hustled through the corridors of Echelon V, no less, and first thing I know I'm in a big, carpeted office with Comsignal, himself.

This Comsignal is a lean, tan, grey-haired old boy who moves around like he still might play a pretty sharp

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game of ten-alai. His name is Radcliffe (Rad, behind his back for guys of my rank) and he's a four and a half striper. He's very friendly and not self-conscious or too, too democratic about it all, like a lot of brass are.

One of the first things he asks me is have I done courier duty before, and I say yes, in a small way. The usual thing—an occasional confidential message carried Subcon when my orders were taking me to its address, anyway.

"Good," he says. "Then you've been through the Memorizer. You know the procedure."

I tell him yes, sir, I do.

"Well, Captain Jonathan," he says, "you are going to deliver what may turn out to be the most important message in the whole Medean War. A movement order for Bisley's Fourth Fleet. I won't go into details, but if you get through, it may mean the end of this damned conflict. Now, I've worked out a little theory of communication—"

"A theory, sir?" I ask.

Which, of course, is a mistake. He immediately brightens and goes into a big routine about a communication channel which has a capacity of C units accepting information from the source at H units per second, so that transmission is possible at an average rate of C/H, but never more than that.

But you're not interested in all that. The upshot is that Radcliff has me bustled over to Psycho Bay, then, and even goes along himself to see that the Memorizer puts the right message into my brain. Takes about twenty minutes, and outside of the usual itching and skin prickling, it's not so bad.

Then he takes me back to his office, makes me strip stark naked and has some space coveralls—you know, the kind with all the pockets and loops—brought in, and insists I wear them. This in spite of the fact that I'm to make the jump in a brand new fighter, clean as a whistle in the cockpit. Then two big, burly Spacerine Guards are assigned to me to see that I go no place but the Officer's Club here, and that's another reason I'm going to all this trouble to write instead of using soundfilm or magnetape. I don't want them breathing on my neck while I'm communicating with you.

Well, dearest, blast-off is in an hour or so, and I just want you to know that I'm thinking of you in this hour, and that I love you and miss you very, very much.

Oh—I forgot—Radcliffe promised me he'd send you a quick Viz if I get through, so you can know I'm safe while you read this letter. Or otherwise. Anyway, for the present, so long, darling.

With Greatest Love,

Frank.

MEDEAN SPACE COMMAND SOUNDFILM

Galactic Time Unit 123145.002

TITLE: Report 223-A-11

TO: Oligarch

FROM: Kaz, Commanding Unit X.

PICTURE: Big Close-up of Kaz.

KAZ: Without wishing to be over-optimistic, Sires, I have the honor to report this time unit that the possible end of the Terran War is in sight.

We have intercepted an important tactical message calling for a movement of Admiral Bisley's Fourth Fleet from its present position. Because of the emergency nature of the situation, I have taken the responsibility for certain action in this matter, which becomes the subject of this report.

The following film sequence, taken

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in our interrogation room, will clarify things. You will recognize myself and my executive officer, Lunji. The Terran with us is Captain Frank Jonathan, a space pilot, intercepted and captured by our patrol at 23-43-12 LVA Medean Standard, which is only several thousand distance units from our present position on Ulicron IV.

DISSOLVE TO:

PICTURE: Kaz and Lunji at L-shaped panel desk. The Terran, Captain Frank Jonathan sits quietly before them in a large, padded chair. He is smoking the usual Terran cigarette.

JONATHAN: For the last time, gents—I'll tell you my name, rank, serial number, and that's all. You know the Alpha Convention as well as I do.

KAZ: Captain, what do I have to do to convince you that I'm asking you to talk for your own good? Believe me, I'm only interested in saving you from the torture of the Extractor.

JONATHAN: (Laughs acidly) Yeah. Sure. I can see one of you Medeans going out of your way to save somebody from torture.

KAZ: You misunderstand me, Captain. Of course there have been instances of cruelty in this war—on both sides, I may remind you. However. Let me attempt to show you the futility of stubbornness. Do you realize what we know of you already? (Turns to Lunji.) Your report, Lunji.

LUNJI (With usual delicate quivering of third eye connected with recall process) Analysis of subject's carriage, voice, mannerisms, and general attitude reveal him to be twenty-eight earth years of age, I.Q. approximately 130, Emotional Index middle-low, married, has been a space pilot approximately five earth years, lately engaged in training rather than tactical duties. Ray search of garments reveals common paraphernalia: one writing instrument, identification tag, wallet with sheaf of Terran credits, handwritten letters, photograph, presumably of wife, pack of cigarettes, a lighter. No hidden weapons.

JONATHAN: Okay. So what?

LUNJI: General reactions and situation in which intercepted indicate subject is courier. Conclusion, based also on course of subject's spacer is that he carries memorygram for Admiral Bisley of the Terran Fourth Fleet.

KAZ: Well, Captain, do you wish to save yourself the agony of the Extractor? You can't beat it, you know. Are you going to be logical, Captain, and tell us your memorized message under a simple lie detector—or are you going to cling to the usual Terran sentimentality in these matters?

LUNJI: Perhaps the Captain is not familiar with the effect of the Extractor.

KAZ: Oh, I think he is. I think all Terrans know about it—their propaganda has harped on it, enough. A particularly good Magnetape description I heard says it is like a spiked ball within the skull, expanding through the greatest pressure, pressing outward without let-up, and seeming to continue endlessly.

JONATHAN: If you gents know where Hell is, you can both go there.

KAZ: (Rises. Looks a little sad.) I'm afraid we're wasting our time with you, Captain. All right, Lunji. Send him to the Extractor. Go with him. And bring me a complete report as soon as you have it.

(Lunji rises. Captain Jonathan rises, too, just a little shakily in spite of his determination to show no fear. He takes a last, dramatic puff from his cigarette in the typical exhibition-

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istic Terran manner. Lunji takes him to the door. Camera pans, following; both men pass through door and it closes behind them.)

FADE OUT.

FADE IN FOLLOWING:

(Same door. It opens. Lunji comes in. His face shows strain.)

CUT TO:

Big Close-up of Kaz

KAZ: Well?

CUT TO:

Medium Shot. Lunji takes his place at panel desk again.

LUNJI: We got the message. It was for Bisley. And it's a movement order—apparently one of some importance. (He tosses a graph on the desk.) Here are the details.

KAZ: (Peruses graph.) Hmm. Yes, I would say we're lucky intercepting this one. (He looks up.) How—how did he take it?

LUNJI (Shrugs.) He screamed bloody murder.

KAZ: It's a pity. We almost always have to put them through the Extractor.

LUNJI: It's their hard luck if they insist on heroics. No Medean would act like that. None of us would blame another Medean for being logical and talking if he knew they'd get it out of him anyway.

KAZ: No, I suppose not. Well, as far as this Jonathan is concerned, it won't be so bad, after all. He'll never remember going through the Extractor.

LUNJI: He won't remember it? Why not?

KAZ: (With quiet satisfaction.) I've a little plan. You know that our staff has been working pretty hard on Terran mentality—especially memory. It isn't hard to take a given period of time out of a Terran's mind. Take it out completely. Well, we're going to do that to Captain Jonathan. When we're through he'll have absolutely no memory of being captured, talking to us, or going through the Extractor.

LUNJI: What's the purpose of all that, sir?

KAZ: Just this. At the same time we erase his memory we are going to have our own Memorizer implant a false message in his brain. He'll remember this false message in spite of forgetting what happened here. It will be, oh, something reasonably close to the message he was carrying. Something that will seem legitimate to Bisley. Bisley will make the move indicated by the message. We'll make our countermove even before he does. We'll have him well trapped, this time. And if we destroy the Fourth Fleet, Terra has *got* to surrender. It'll be an end to this damned war....

* * *

COMFOURTH TO COMSUPREME

By Warp-Wave. Negative Code. Message follows:

RECEIVED MOVEMENT ORDERS BY COURIER. AM COMPLYING IMMEDIATELY. BISLEY.

* * *

KAZ TO ALL MEDEAN SECTOR COMMANDERS

By Warp-Wave. Urgent. Time Security Cipher 6.

TERRAN FOURTH FLEET ABOUT TO PROCEED COORDINATES 23-59-97 LVA MEDEAN STANDARD. INTERCEPT AND DESTROY.

ABOARD the Flagspacer, Neptune. 12 January, 3150.

Hello, again, Sweetheart!

Well, there was nothing to it.

I'm sitting here in the Ready

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Lounge of old Asteroid Bisley's flagspacer, just had a belt of space ration, and feeling on top of the galaxy. The old boy himself said I'd probably get a Solar Medal for delivering the message, and Radcliffe back on Terra will probably get a Corps of Excellence ribbon for himself. The best part is that Bisley thinks the war is practically over. When he makes the move my message ordered the Medeans will be so hopelessly tied up, they'll be bound to surrender. They're not emotional like us Terrans, you know—they know when they're licked.

So we're on our way to certain position in space, and when we get there, and establish a planethead, it should be the beginning of the end.

As I said, there was nothing to it. I was just lucky, I guess. I blasted off Terra at the appointed time in a new fighter, a good one. It was swell to feel a hot ship again, and it was good to be out in space and look at all that endless black, and the bright peppering of stars everywhere. I just kept traveling. Not so much as a planetoid bump. Kept myself busy on course re-checks, and watching the instruments for signs of enemy ships. I got one faint buzz way out past the system, but that was all. I think I can safely say not a Medean knows I got through.

Well, I wish I could report a lot of excitement and pretend I've been a hero, and everything, but almost before I knew it I was orbiting to the Fourth Fleet Command Post. They took me to old Bisley, himself. Nice old duck; he's little and wrinkled and very square-shouldered and covered with cosmic freckles. Seemed he'd expected me, which I thought was kind of funny. I mean, if my trip was supposed to be a secret and everything I wonder why they sent a warp-wave saying I was coming. He even showed it to me. *Courier on way*, it said, *carry out our planned project, regards, Rad.* Or words to that effect.

Anyway, I repeated the memorized message I had to Bisley. He thanked me. Radcliffe and he must have gone to different schools together, or something, because he took one look at my space overalls, then, and immediately ordered a full dress uniform for me to change to. Said he liked things neat aboard the flagspacer, and made me change right there in his cabin.

(Later) Something very funny's just happened. I interrupted writing this to go to chow and ran into the Astrogator at the table. He told me where we're headed—and it's not the place ordered in my message at all! I saw Bisley about it immediately and he just smiled and said yes, he was well aware of it. Beats me. Maybe next letter I'll know more about what's going on.

Well, I better get this off quick and make the next mail missile. All the love in the world,

Frank.

VISAPHONE Transcript, 15 Jantune. 12 January, 3150.

COMSIGNAL to COMSUPREME

SIGNAL: Well, first of all, sir, my hearty congratulations on the victory. I understand the Medeans want to negotiate surrender terms as soon as possible.

SUPREME: Yes, Rad. I guess this is our big day. We out-maneuvered them completely. And we've got you to thank for getting that message through. Only I never have had time yet to find out how you did it. Come on—out with it, fellow.

SIGNAL: Well, sir, in these interstellar wars we've used every sort of communication device our science

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could find. ESP, warp-wave, missiles, memorizers, all the rest. But last time Bisley was on Terra he and I cooked up a device we were sure the Medeans would overlook completely. Here's how it worked. As a red herring I had the Memorizer implant a false movement message in Captain Jonathan's mind—Jonathan, of course, believing it to be real. Now, as we've since learned, the Medeans intercepted him. They extracted the false message, planted their own false message, and erased his memory of the incident. Do you follow, sir?

SUPREME: Yes, I think so. But how the deuce did Bisley get the real message—the one he was supposed to get?

SIGNAL: By making Jonathan change clothes. The real message was in the pocket of the space coveralls I gave him.

SUPREME: What? Then how come the Medeans didn't get *that?*

SIGNAL: Because—like any other letter he might be carrying around—the real message was written in plain English, by hand, on a common, ordinary piece of paper. The last thing in the universe they'd look for!

SUPREME: Great, suffering spacehounds! Rad, I don't know whether to bust you or cite you for a Solar Medal for this!

SIGNAL: I'll take the medal, if you insist, sir. And if Jonathan gets one, too.

SUPREME: All right. I'll dictate a magnetape citation for those medals right now. No, wait—on second thought I'll just write those citations in plain English, by hand, on a common, ordinary piece of paper....

THE END

EINSTEIN—AND GRAVITY!

★ **By H. R. STANTON** ★

FOR THE past ten years or so, pronouncements coming from Einstein have generally been of the nature of political, social or humorous types. The famous remark: "I don't know with what weapons the Third World War will be fought, but I do know what weapons will be used in the Fourth—rocks!" while interesting does not show the real Einstein, the intellectual beacon of physics.

It is refreshing—almost overwhelming—to read the newspaper announcements that at long last, Albert Einstein has finally devised what he believes to be the "unified field theory". It is too bad that so little space was devoted to the matter, a far cry from the days back in the Twenties when Relativity was on everyone's tongue.

Mathematical physics is an abstruse subject, and nothing is more abstruse than the efforts of Einstein to bring into subjection the terrific problem of gravity and electromagnetism. Ever since the theory of relativity and the developement of quantum mechanics, scientists have been obsessed with this major problem of connecting electromagnetic waves and gravity. Einstein has more or less dedicated his life to this work. He calls it the unified field theory.

Nowhere in nature or in the laboratory does there appear to be a connection between gravity and electromagnetic waves. For some reason nature has managed to hide any connection between gravity and electricity. Yet scientists are almost sure that in some mysterious way they are linked.

Since they don't show any material manifestation, perhaps the only way left to attack the subject is from the same standpoint that Einstein used so successfully in relativity—namely, through theory, through mathematics, through the power of the human mind and the powerful strength of mathematical philosophy.

According to the reports Einstein says he thinks he has the answer. If he has, his achievement will be regarded as the greatest scientific feat of the Twentieth Century. Let us hope that this is the case.

Science seems ripe for the solution of the greatest of all problems. We wait anxiously to read the simplified reports of this great work. Though no experimental tests have yet been devised, be assured that such things will be found—just as was the case in Relativity.

★ ★ ★

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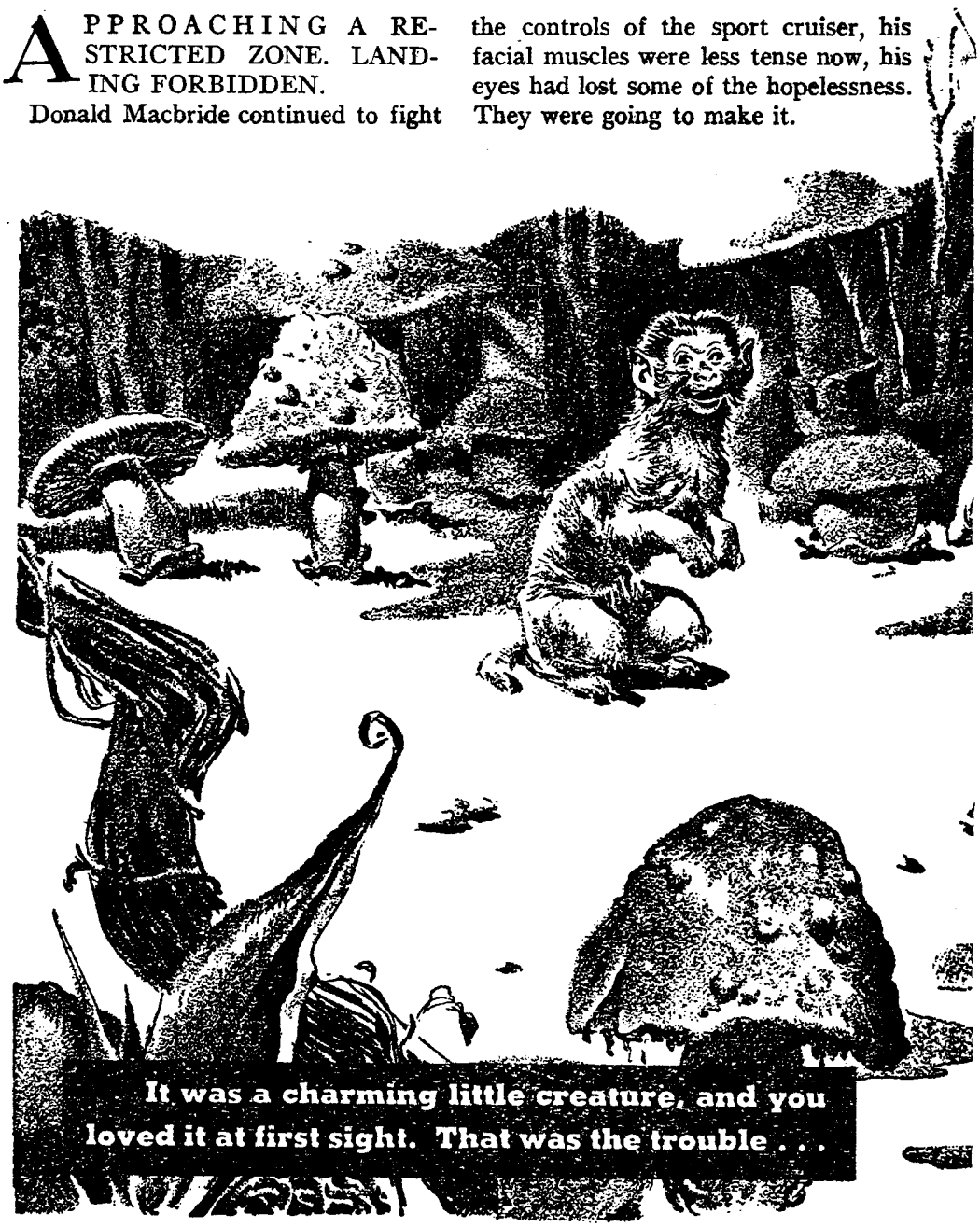
LUVVER

By Mack Reynolds

APPROACHING A RESTRICTED ZONE. LANDING FORBIDDEN.

Donald Macbride continued to fight the controls of the sport cruiser, his facial muscles were less tense now, his eyes had lost some of the hopelessness. They were going to make it.



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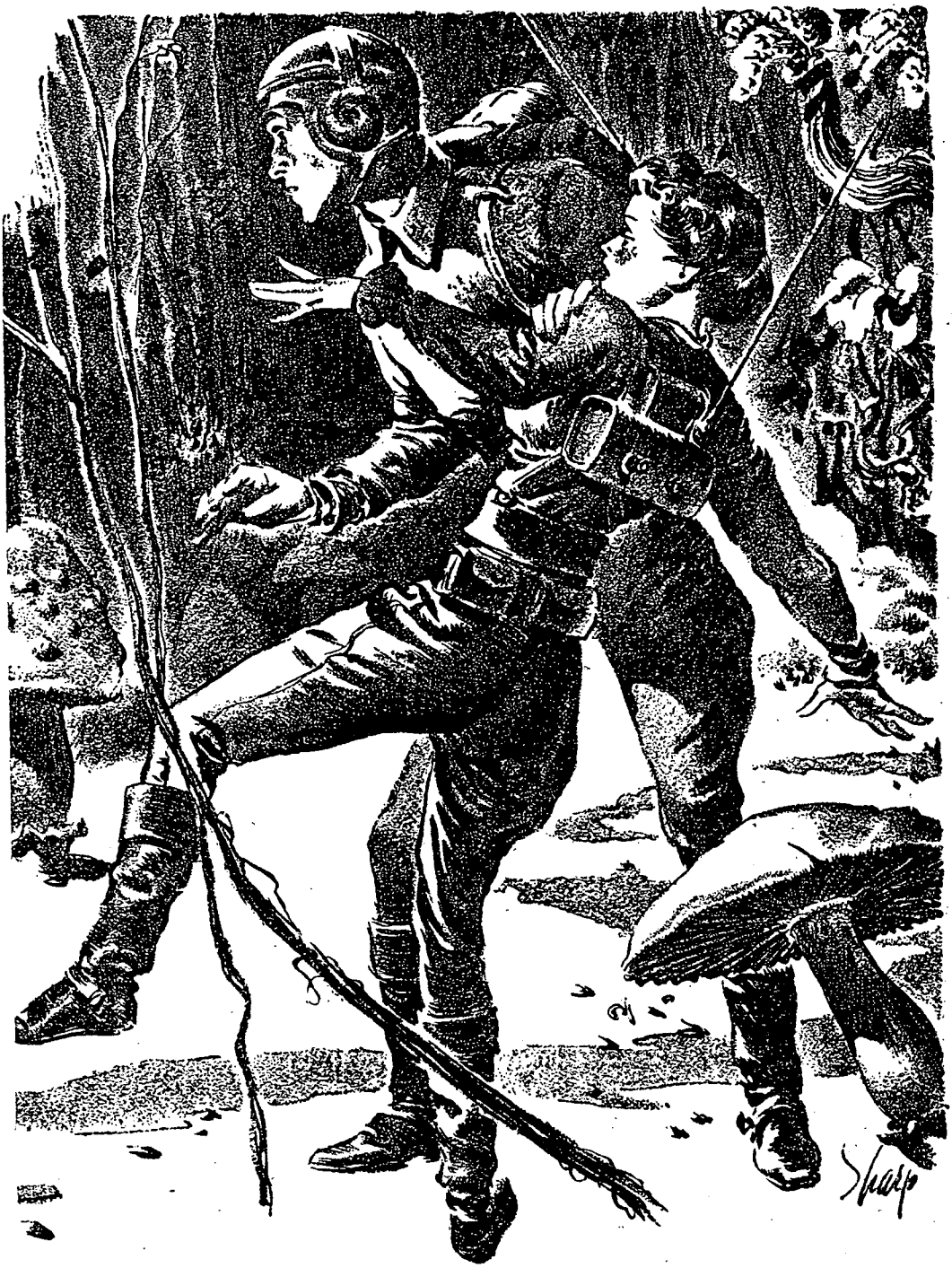

As the little creature came into view and grinned happily at them, he pulled the girl backward and twisted her body sharply around . . .

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The radio blared again.

APPROACHING A RESTRICTED ZONE. LANDING FORBIDDEN.

Macbride grimaced wryly. "It's like telling a man who's just come through a desert not to drink." He wrenched hard at a control lever. "The worst part's over, we'll make it, honey." He wiped perspiration from his forehead. "I didn't tell you back there, but I was convinced we were goners."

She shivered. "You didn't have to tell me, father. Actually. Looking at you was enough..."

The televisor screen lit up and an angry-faced, red-headed young man was pictured.

He spoke curtly. "Haven't you received our warnings? You're entering a restricted zone. For security reasons it's forbidden..."

Macbride flared back. "You young fool. Can't you see we're in distress? It's all I've been able to do to wrestle this blasted thing through the last half million miles. And you tell us we can't land!"

The face in the televisor scowled worriedly. "Can't you make it to some other port? Only an extreme emergency..."

The older man glared at him. "We'll be lucky if we make it to your field. This *is* an extreme emergency. My daughter and I are fortunate to have made it this far."

"Daughter?" The young man's eyes went back over Macbride's shoulder and widened when they took in the trim blonde. "I'll be a *makron,* a girl!" He caught what he'd said, began to redden. The screen suddenly went dead.

Patricia Macbride laughed. "Why, he blushed, father. Actually. I didn't know it happened anymore."

Her father scowled at her, still fighting his controls. "Didn't it ever occur to you that there were still some young fellows raised with the old common decency to be ashamed to swear before a lady?"

She giggled. "Not any more."

He snorted and began to answer, but the televisor screen brightened again. The face was that of a newcomer. His expression was somewhat startled, and his Space Forces cap and his tie gave the impression of having been hurriedly located and donned. His voice was formal, but his eyes were wide, and although he spoke to Macbride, he kept them on Patricia.

"Lieutenant Steve Benton, sir. Officer in command of Security Base 1645R. I must warn you that only in extreme emergency can you be permitted to land, and that if you do land there is a possibility that you may never leave."

The owner of the crippled space craft growled indignantly. "Nonsense. Climb down off your military high-horse. Can't you see what we are? A man and his daughter in a sport cruiser that's gone haywire. We must land. It'll be easy enough to check my credentials. Do we look like spies or something?"

THE LIEUTENANT stiffened slightly under the tongue lashing. "You don't understand, sir. It's unsafe for human beings. This is not a military base. We're here to warn off all spaceships. You might say that this is the equivalent of a lighthouse."

Macbride was impatient. "Whatever it is, we're coming in for a landing. Stand by."

"Just one thing, sir. After landing, don't leave your ship and don't look out your ports. You'll be in considerable danger every moment you're on this planet. We'll do what we can to protect you."

* * *

Half an hour later, the small cruiser

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had safely landed on the tiny planet's sole field. Now that the strain of bringing the damaged craft through so many miles of space was over, the reaction set in. The middle-aged Macbride slumped into an acceleration chair, dragging away at a cigarette.

"Where the devil are they? Don't land! Don't leave the ship! Don't look out the ports! The place is probably populated by the insane, and I'm about ready to join them."

Patricia giggled. "They didn't look insane. The red-headed one was cute. Actually."

They heard a tapping at the inner door of the space lock, and with a grunt Macbride went to open it. The visitors had already closed the outer lock and the view beyond them couldn't be seen.

They were correctly arrayed in Space Force uniform, but it obviously was strange to them. Lieutenant Benton's collar was too tight, his tie askew. The other wore regulation tunic but it looked as though it had been packed away in a musty trunk for many a year while its owner had gone in less formal attire. Both of them seemed ill at ease.

Lieutenant Steve Benton was stiff. "May I present Lieutenant Dave Malone, my assistant?"

Macbride rumbled, "I'm Donald Macbride, of Terra; this is my daughter, Patricia. I must say, our treatment thus far on the part of representatives of my planet's Space Forces has been cavalier, to say the least."

The eyes of the two lieutenants were on the daughter, not the father, but Benton managed to fumble through an answer. "More than sorry, sir...but, er, orders. I'm afraid that this is an extremely dangerous place to land."

Patricia giggled. "It's monstrously thrilling. So adventurous. Actually."

Her father snorted. "Undoubtedly, the Space Forces have sufficient strength to protect any civilians present on the planet. Lieutenant, I assume you've the mechanics and repair facilities to patch up this cursed cruiser of mine?"

Benton dragged his eyes back to Macbride. "Lieutenent Malone and I are alone here. However, both of us have had considerable experience on space craft. We should be able to have your sporter in space again within a few days. Unfortunately, you'll have to spend the full time cooped up in our quarters...I'm afraid it won't be too comfortable."

Patricia bubbled, "You mean the air here can't be breathed? You must stay inside all of the time? How utterly dreadful. You must become dreadfully bored. Actually!"

Lieutenant Dave Malone finally found his tongue. He'd been standing, almost open-mouthed, looking at this luscious product of earth's most expensive beauty salons. "It's not that, Miss Macbride. The air's all right. It's just that we can't let you be exposed to the animal life here."

She giggled. "But, Lieutenant, I'm sure you could protect us."

Her father snorted. "If these animals are so dangerous, why is it that you men don't find it necessary to carry weapons?"

BENTON took over. "You don't understand, sir. The danger isn't of the type from which a gun could protect you." He shivered slightly, as though the very idea was repugnant. "At any rate, the thing to do now is get you to our quarters where you can rest. Lieutenant Malone and I will look over your ship and see what is needed. I'm afraid you'll have to wear blindfolds for the short walk to our place."

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They ran into protest on that but Lieutenant Benton was adamant. Blindfolds must be worn. Regulations. Finally, they submitted and were led carefully from the space cruiser, across what seemed to be a grassy field, to the residence of the two Space Forces officers. A moment later the blindfolds were removed and they were free to examine their surroundings.

The quarters were ample in size, and seemingly the two men had all they needed in their lonely exile, but it could be seen that the isolated life had seduced them from army trimness. The place was a bachelor shambles.

"What you need around here is a woman," Patricia giggled.

"You ain't just a-whistlin' Dixie," Malone breathed.

Macbride crushed him with a stare.

"To keep the place neat," the redhead added quickly. "Let's see, it's been nearly six years since anybody's been here but us."

"Six years!" Macbride protested. "Do you mean to say that you men haven't been relieved in six years? Why that's unbelievable."

"It's been more than ten years for Steve," Malone said wryly.

"That's enough, Dave," Steve Benton rapped. "You've said too much."

"He hasn't said enough," Macbride retorted belligerently. "I know the Space Forces. Put three years in myself during the Martian war. And leaving men alone at an isolated base for six years, not to mention ten, without relief, is unnecessary hardship. You boys are being called upon for sacrifices beyond the call of duty."

Steve Benton walked wearily over to a portable bar and pressed various buttons. Four frosted glasses emerged. He motioned the others to chairs and handed around the drinks.

"You'll recall, Mr. Macbride, that just before you landed I warned you that possibly you would never be able to leave. That's the position in which Lieutenant Malone and I find ourselves."

The older man's face reddened. "You mean we'd be forced to remain on this unknown, unpopulated, planet for a lengthy time?"

Dave Malone grinned and took a sip of his drink. "Not for a lengthy time, sir. Forever."

Macbride turned his glare from Benton to Malone. "What kind of a fantastic threat is that?"

Benton raised his hand. "Don't misunderstand, Mr. Macbride. We have no desire to force you to remain here. And, if proper precautions continue to be maintained, there will be no reason for your staying. Just remember, you must stay inside this building until your craft is repaired and you are ready to leave.

"I might also add that Lieutenant Malone seems to have given you an incorrect impression. The Space Forces haven't forced us to remain here. We stay of our own will. Twice a year a transport is sent to drop us our requirements." He pointed out the portable bar and various other conveniences usually not seen in a military establishment. "We receive a good deal more than commonly comes under the head of rations. Our life is quite comfortable."

"I think it's all perfectly mysterious. Actually," Patricia giggled. "You forbid us to land, claiming it's too dangerous, but when we do we find nobody here except you boys. You make us wear blindfolds so we can't see anything, and tell us you've been here six years without any relief. You even draw the curtains so we can't see out your windows. Actually. It's so *mysterious*. I just know I'll love staying

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for awhile—really I will."

DAVE MALONE was gazing at her with the worshipful eyes of an adoring puppy. Steve Benton looked over at him and snapped, "Come on Dave. We'd better take a look at the cruiser. I hope we have all the materials necessary for its repair."

He turned back to the two civilians. "You'll find everything you need. Food, drinks, books, phonograph—movies, if you want. Make yourselves at home. We'll be back shortly. I'm afraid I must ask your word that you won't either leave the building nor look out its windows."

"All right," Macbride snorted.

"Miss Macbride?"

"I promise," Patricia giggled.

When they found themselves in the open and walking toward the damaged ship, Steve Benton eyed the other worriedly. "You'd better watch yourself, Dave, or you'll be in an emotional mess. You know she can't stay here and you can't leave."

Malone answered quickly. "Why not? Why couldn't she stay? It's not so bad here. We get along fine, don't we? Why not fix it so they'd have to remain too? We'd have company, Steve. Why it'd even be a relief to have the old man around. Somebody new."

The muscles twitched in the senior officer's face. "You know better than that, Dave. Being stationed here means more than just doing the usual spaceman's duty. We've got a trust. In a way, the race depends on us. If we start letting down on the job just a fraction, it'll be a precedent that'll make it that much easier next time."

"There'd never need be another time. And nobody would have to know we did it deliberately, not even them."

Steve Benton's grin was wry. "I see. When you get this girl for yourself, that ends it. Suppose I want one later on? And suppose that Macbride decides he wants a wife to share his exile? It could pile up, Dave, until the whole project would be a failure."

The redhead was depressed. "I suppose you're right, Steve." They walked in silence for a moment and his natural exuberance reasserted itself. "Maybe she'll see a *luvver* by accident," he said hopefully.

AT THE beginning, dinner that night was pleasant enough. For the two exiles, Macbride's crusty nature and snorting comments were more than counterbalanced by his daughter's accentuated feminine charm. It evidently hadn't occured to either of them that her giggling would lose its charm given a period of years—if not months. It was obvious that they thought her wonderful.

"What's the report on the ship?" Macbride growled. "How soon can we leave?"

"Perhaps late tomorrow," Benton told him. There was an air of hopefulness in his reply.

"Why, I never," Patricia objected. "You actually sound as though you're in a hurry to have us leave. Actually. I'll bet Lieutenant Malone doesn't feel that way." She turned her limpid blue eyes on that love-sick worthy.

The redhead gulped. "Golly, no. But Steve doesn't mean it that way, Miss Macbride..."

She giggled, "Call me Patricia."

He gulped again. "Er...Patricia. It's just that it isn't safe for you to stay. Every hour is as dangerous as the last and neither of us will be able to rest until we get you safely away."

Donald Macbride grunted skeptically. "I think this is a farce. You continually talk of danger, but both of you go unarmed. You hint at something terrible and refuse to let us look

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out of the windows. Something strange is going on here. You two are hiding something."

Steve Benton got to his feet, the muscles of his cheeks working. He tossed his napkin to the table. "That is exactly what we are doing, sir. That is why the Space Forces left us here—to hide something. Now, I am afraid it would be better if we refrained from discussing the subject. You must be tired. Lieutenant Malone will show you to your rooms."

"Aw, Steve," the redhead protested, "it might be years before we have another chance to talk to someone."

Benton was curt. "Unfortunately, Mr. Macbride seems unable to refrain from objecting to the strict regulations that must be enforced here. I think it would be preferable if the conversation was ended. We'll finish repairs on the ship tomorrow and have our guests back into space as soon as possible."

"Young man," Macbride rumbled, "You're insufferable. When we arrive home I shall be forced to report you."

Steve Benton laughed bitterly. "You do that, sir. It'll be interesting to see what kind of punishment the Space Forces can figure out for a man who is permanently assigned, without relief, to this two-by-four planet."

Dave Malone grinned at the idea. "Maybe you'll be demoted, Steve."

IT HADN'T been any easier for Steve Benton to resist Patricia Macbride's charms than it had for Dave Malone. Benton was as normal as the next man; and the next man was pretty normal seeing that he was the red-headed Malone. Ten years without feminine companionship of any sort hadn't been easy to bear, nor did it help matters for him to realize that a similar ten years stretched ahead, and another ten beyond that. Exile! Perpetual exile and nothing else.

He tossed in his bed, knowing that under the same roof, a few score yards away, slept a beautiful, desirable woman. He'd almost forgotten that women were more than fairy tales seen prettily portrayed by the movie projector; had almost forgotten that they were more than characters in the endless number of novels he read to while away the years. Almost...

He was unable to sleep and finally threw back the covers, got to his feet and searched for and finally found a cigarette on the small table beside his bed. The window was open and the coolness of the night air touched him. He idly looked out, hoping that the strangers would obey his orders to leave *their* windows closed and shades drawn. Not that there was as much danger at night, but, still, you never knew when a *luvver* might choose to stroll near the base.

A glimpse of white drew his attention. It seemed to be moving. He frowned, not being able to place it, and peered out trying to pierce the night's gloom.

Suddenly, he was on his feet and dashing for the door. He banged into several pieces of furniture, not taking the time to switch on a light.

A sleepy-eyed Malone stared bewilderedly at him from the doorway of another bedroom. He mumbled, "What goes on?"

Benton yelled back over his shoulder as he dashed through the front entrance. "She's out there! Patricia's gone outside. You stay here. Watch her old man..."

The redhead was instantly awake. "I'll be a *makron*. It's happened. We should've locked them in."

Steve Benton dashed across the field, searching the shadows with his eyes as best he could, as he ran. So far, so good. Not a *luvver* in sight. It

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just might be possible. . .

He reached her side and grasped her arm roughly. She was dressed in a white, semi-transparent negligee. She should have looked like Cleopatra to him, but she didn't. He had no time nor patience for her femininity.

He shook her. "You fool. What are you doing out here? Get back into the house immediately. What have you seen?" he added anxiously.

She tried to shake off his hand with impatience as he hurried her toward the building but he hustled her along, still darting his eyes into every shadow, nervously, alertly.

"Oh, Lieutenant. . . Steve. . . don't be so rough. It was so stuffy in there. I couldn't sleep. Please, my arm. . . Besides, what is there to see? You were so mysterious, but there's nothing out here except an old landing field with the usual hanger and repair shop."

He grunted. "Maybe you're safe. They don't come out very often at night." He increased their pace, almost dragging her toward the house. "What got into you? Didn't I tell you that under no circumstances. . ."

She giggled. "I was going to keep very quiet and if you caught me I was going to pretend I was sleepwalking. . . Why, look!"

HE DARTED his eyes at her. "Look at what? *What do you see?*" He tried anxiously to make out what she was staring at. She'd been in the dark longer than he; her eyes were better adjusted to the night. He shook her roughly. *"What do you see?"*

She answered impatiently, still trying to free her arm. "Don't be silly. It's nothing. Just an adorable little animal, a cute little thing about the size of a fox terrier, something like a tiny monkey. Why, look at those big, sad eyes. Steve. . . it's *lovable.*"

He groaned, "A *luvver.*"

He swung her around sharply so that she faced him, and lashed out cruelly with his fist to the point of her jaw. She slumped forward and he caught her up into his arms.

He carried her to the door and kicked on it, swearing under his breath as his bare foot struck the metal.

"Let me in, Dave," he yelled. "There's a *luvver* out here. Be sure the old man doesn't see it, and by all means don't let it in! Use all your will power, Dave. *Even if it wants in,* don't let it in!"

Malone's voice was muffled through the door but the strained quality could be felt. "All right, Steve, I'm opening up. Come in quick."

The door opened wide enough for Benton to slip through with his burden and was slammed immediately after him. The redhead stood with his back to it, sweat on his forehead. "Thank God, I didn't see it! It would have been hell if I had and it felt like coming into the house."

Steve Benton took the girl to a couch and tried to make her comfortable. He ran his hand through his hair quickly, nervously, as though he wanted to tear out a handful. He stared at her desperately.

Donald Macbride came hurrying from his room, shrugging into a night robe. His face was drawn. "What's happened? What's Patricia doing here?"

Steve ignored him and snapped at Malone, "She barely got a glimpse of it. Get the lethe drug, Dave. It's her only chance."

The redhead tore from the room and returned in seconds, a hypodermic needle and a small medicine bottle in his hands.

Macbride stared at them. "What's the matter with my daughter? What are you doing? Why is she uncon-

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scious... or, is she..."

Steve Benton was rapidly filling the hypodermic. "She's not dead if that's what you mean. I knocked her out. She saw a *luvver* out there. Our only chance is to try and wipe the memory from her mind." The hypodermic needle filled, he bared her arm and bent over her to make the injection.

Her father reached his side and roughly caught his arm. "Just a minute. I want to know more about this. I don't understand at all. What's in that needle?"

Malone pushed him aside. "Stand back, you old fool. Do you want your daughter ever to leave this place? If you do, shut up and pray. If we'd known she was such a spoilt, headstrong brat, we'd have locked her in her room."

"But...but..."

STEVE BENTON rapidly finished making the injection. He threw the hypo needle wearily to the table and went over to the automatic bar to return with three stiff brandies. He handed drinks to the others and motioned them to chairs.

He gulped half of his own drink and waited a long moment before saying anything. Then he looked at the now pale father of the unconscious girl.

"You'll have to know this now, I guess, in spite of all regulations."

"I...I don't understand."

Steve Benton sighed. "No, of course, you don't. Only a score of men in the whole system do." He paused for another spell, then went on. "The last time this happened was six years ago. Dave was the victim at that time. The circumstances were quite similar; the ship he was on put in for an emergency landing. As in your case, I made all efforts to prevent its crew from going outside. The mystery was too much for our red-headed friend and he slipped away and saw a *luvver*. From then on he had to share my exile. Neither of us will ever leave this isolated planet." He ran his hand over his mouth. "I hope the measures we've taken with your daughter will save her from the same destiny."

Macbride sputtered. "Fantastic! Just the sight of this ridiculous animal? What horrible..."

Benton finished his drink and accepted the fresh one Dave Malone handed him. The redhead had been standing at the bar, downing one after another.

Steve Benton shook his head. "Have you ever considered, Mr. Macbride, how many different methods animal life uses as a means of defense? Consider, for a moment, the animals you find on earth. One runs fast, the deer, for instance; another, the snake, its poisonous. The skunk repels enemies with its scent; the wart-hog with its repulsive appearance. The bird flies away from danger, the chameleon camouflages itself by changing its color to blend with its surroundings. The great cats are fierce, the elephant is large as a fortress, the bee has its sting, the turtle its armor, the porcupine, its quills."

The older man looked worriedly at his daughter. "I fail to see what it has to do with Patricia, but if I must listen to this, at least let us make her comfortable."

Dave Malone said, "She's all right. She'll be dead to the world for at least three days."

"Three days!"

"Let me go on," Steve Benton pursued. "Your daughter is the victim of the natural defense of the *luvver*, an animal peculiar to this planet. It's the only life-form known that uses an ability to create affection as its defensive mechanism."

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MACBRIDE was indignant. "You mean to tell me that the only thing this fearful animal does is inspire affection?"

"That's right. All it does is inspire affection. *Everything*, not just everybody, loves a *luvver*. Nothing would dream of hurting one. In fact, it has difficulty keeping other animals away. They'll follow a *luvver* in droves, adoringly. Omniverous, like man, it never has trouble securing all the meat it wants. Its animal victims just come close and lovingly let themselves be killed and eaten. Its ability to create affection is actually stronger than the instinct of self-preservation."

"You mean that Patricia would have let the creature kill her without fighting, or, at least, running?" There was an edge of horror in the man's voice.

"Happily, we aren't faced with that problem. The *luvver* doesn't seem to care for human flesh. Its danger to your daughter is the fact that it inspires *undying* love."

"I can't see that as such a danger. after all, man has loved his cats and dogs for centuries..."

"I said *undying love*. Irresistible love, unthinking love. Picture the possibilities. Suppose one was taken to earth and placed in a zoo. Every person who ever saw it would find himself unable to stay away from the *luvver*. Millions of persons would pack the zoo trying to be near it. Hundreds, thousands, would scheme, steal, fight, in efforts to try and take it home for their exclusive affection. In short, Macbride, the *luvver* exerts a stronger force that the most vicious narcotic.

"We are going to place your daughter on your ship tomorrow and let you blast off. I warn you, never mention the *luvver* to her. If you are fortunate, we will have been successful in wiping its memory from her mind. When she revives, observe her. If she demands to be brought back here, then bring her back. Nothing can be done. She'd die of melancholy if kept indefinitely from seeing a *luvver*."

Macbride seemed suddenly old. His face was ashen. His hair, formerly but streaked with gray, now seemed white. He was comprehending slowly.

"But why has the Space Forces left you two here to keep off ships? Why not just kill them? Destroy them utterly!"

Dave Malone shuddered at the blasphemy. "You can't kill a *luvver*. You wouldn't let yourself. All we can do is prevent others from seeing them, and keep them from spreading to other planets. Can you see the danger that some ship might land here and unknowingly take several of the things aboard for pets? Wherever they went people would follow like the rats followed the Pied Piper."

* * *

Macbride was able to blast off shortly before dusk of the next day. He'd been led to the little spacer blindfolded, as before. Steve Benton carried the drugged girl and deposited her in her bunk.

Afterwards the two exiles stood and watched as the cruiser disappeared into the sky.

"Perhaps we got the drug into her in time," Malone said. "She didn't really see the *luvver* very well or for very long."

Steve looked at his companion wryly. "I thought you were so anxious to have her stay."

His companion shrugged irritably. "I'm not so sure. To tell you the truth, Steve, it got to be a burden having strangers here so long and being away from *them*..."

They approached the house again, their eyes brightening.

"There's one of the little darlings now." Steve Benton squatted down

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on his heels and held out a piece of sugar in his hand. "Here sweetheart, here precious..."

A *luvver* detached itself from the shade of the building and stared at them wistfully. They both smiled in adoration.

It strolled over languidly.

THE END

THE MARTIAN BLAST

★ By JOHN WESTON ★

ON JANUARY 6th of this year an announcement came from the Osaka observatory in Japan to the effect that a tremendous explosion had been observed upon Mars!

A little while later corroboration had been received from a number of other places and right now, scientists at the University of New Mexico are correlating all reports in an effort to determine the cause and to further understand the nature of the explosion.

Previously, a similar discovery had been made about nineteen thirty-three. One theory has it that the explosions are due to volcanic dust or ash. None of the reports even hints or suggests that the blasts may be due to anything else.

Speculation can run rife naturally, on something like this. We can guess that maybe there are Martians, maybe they've built an atomic bomb—and all that sort of thing. The thing is so fantastic that there may be an element of truth in it. For one thing stands out: any explosion on Mars large enough to be seen through an eight inch reflecting telescope must be really big! It seems to us that most natural explosions wouldn't fit exactly into this category.

The problem now is to get numerous other observations through more powerful telescopes. Then we can really begin hypothesizing. Is it so inconceivable at that to imagine that the planet Mars might possibly carry life-forms of an intelligence of the same order as our own? Not at all. True, we don't think that such is the case—but the possibility exists.

If their advancement parallels our own, it is not impossible to imagine that they've attained the Bomb too. If so...

Coming back to Earth once more, even if the strange explosions are natural volcanic gusts, the fact that they've been observed is of tremendous interest. Anything at all happening on another planet is enough to send thrills of anticipation and wonder down one's spine.

It will pay to watch the newspaper columns for further information on this strange phenomenon. But God help us if the Martians have the Hydrogen bomb, too!

THE ARCTIC SHIELD

★ By SANDY MILLER ★

"THEY DON'T have the faintest idea," Clinton, Officer Commanding, First Radar Network, said calmly to the assembled group of officers deep in the icy, earthly bowels of the Arctic Circle, "that we've got the radar and video on them right now." He raised his eyebrows and smiled quizzically, "—and they're in for a surprise if they try something—which is almost a certainty that they will."

Clinton had good reason to brief the officers for the war drums were sounding all over Asia and the atom-headed war rockets would soon begin their long trajectories toward the industrial behemoths of the United States.

Clinton went on talking, reviewing the tense situation and making sure his men had their commands in tip-top shape. The danger was immediate.

Suddenly the red light above the communications desk flared brightly and the triple radar screens flashed on. Two robot-video screens also went on disclosing a flat cheerless field where row on row, were huge rockets, apparently primed and waiting. Simultaneously almost the video screens blinked out as the enemy shot their spy-carriers out of the air. But that was enough. At once the room cleared as men rushed to their posts.

Clinton and his aids saw it come—over the radar screens. The greenish pips of light slowly rose from the center of the screen, their velocity gradually increasing.

There was little emotion on the soldier's face as he pressed the "action" button. The base was primed. Overhead the cold clear sky showed nothing, nor did the radar screen reveal more—for the moment.

"By God!" Clinton roared, "here they come." The pips slithered over the gradu-

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ated line on the screens showing they—the rockets were within firing range.

Now the interceptors, inhuman robotic rockets rose in linear trajectories at tremendous speeds. Little darts of destruction waiting to contact the enemy's worst.

The resultant holocaust astonished even Clinton who had expected something like it. The hideous plumes of exploding atom-headed war rockets filled the skies. The Geigers went mad as the radioactivity overloaded them. The Arctic base spat defense rocket after defense rocket, in huge droves, smothering the attackers beneath an overwhelming superiority.

And as quickly as it had begun, it ended, leaving only the snake-stemmed mushrooms of ice and water and gas to mark the beginning of the war. Laconically, Clinton spoke into the communicators, part of the Washington hook-up: "First enemy rocket attack repelled completely—nothing through the defense screen. Enemy completely unprepared for us. No life lost—neither ours nor theirs."

And, Clinton thought, that "no loss of life" sounds good. How long will robots and rockets do the fighting? When will they succeed in pushing a bomb through to the states? When will the cities feel the hand of the Devil?

Clinton sat down wearily. The war was on nerves, not alone bodies. How could it end? He stopped thinking about it...

ROOM SERVICE—PLUS!

★ **By LESLIE PHELPS** ★

THE HOTEL Solar which has recently been completed at the New Chicago Spaceport can only be described as "out of this world". The construction of the hotel was undertaken by the Terran government at the request of the Astrogational Services as well as the Diplomatic Corps. The reason and necessity for such a hotel is apparent—especially if you drop in at the Spaceport and observe the terrific amount of interplanetary traffic. Rockets are coming and going night and day.

But what makes the hotel unique is its appointments and services. Nowhere in the entire Solar System can you find the variety and completeness of its facilities. Are you a Venusian from the steamy hot jungle planet accustomed to living in forty percent carbon dioxide and a temperature of a hundred and twenty degrees? Well, when you alight from your rocket at New Chicago you won't have to go to makeshift quarters rigged hastily by unfamiliar personnel. Instead you are wafted by an electric car, enclosed and atmosphered to your requirements, directly to the gigantic towering edifice—the Hotel Solar. Venusian quarters are on the thirty-first, thirty-second and thirty-third floors. As far as you're concerned it is like stepping back on your native planet, for here is a murky foggy atmosphere hot and dense, rich in "see-oh-two," and redolent with the earthy jungle odors.

Perhaps you're a Martian, accustomed on your rare Terran visits to choking in Earth's dense oxygen-laden atmosphere and staggering under the increased gravitational load. Your thin bony frame can't take such conditions for long and as a rule you've left Terran hospitality as soon as you could. But not now. You're whisked to the Hotel Solar and comfortably situated in dry, arid, thin-aired rooms perfectly suited to your requirements. Piles of burning *holka* perfume the rare air and you think you're back on Mars. Leeder anti-gravs cut the terrible pull and you're able to walk around with your delicate head in the air.

Then maybe you're a Jovian. For you hitherto a Terran visit has been a nightmare of living in a space-suit and feeling as if you're floating free in space—with all the accompanying nausea.

But not in New Chicago at the Hotel Solar. The minute your rocket docks you're shuttled deep into the bowel of the hotel, through a central lock into the Jovian quarters. Here you nearly collapse from surprise. It is as if a chunk of the Jupiter has been transported to Terra.

Through the capacious chambers of the Jovian Rooms, violent blasts of ammonia-laden methane heavily laced with free fluorine provide you with a rich atmosphere native to your red planet. Leeder gravs are on full and you walk lightly through multi-grav fields as lightly as a Terran through one grav. The breeding rooms provide you with these incredible foods, the muscular flesh of the *sanf*, the succulent tenderness of crystal-plants. You are a Jovian on a bit of Jove.

The authorities have spared no expense in making the Hotel Solar the most magnificent building on Earth. Comments from interplanetary visitors have been extraordinarily favorable.

A Plutonian whose life-cycle operates at two hundred degrees blow zero, found his facilities at the hotel better than the natural climate of Pluto!

If the interstellar drive is ever developed—and we're sure it will be—there will be an interstellar hotel just like the Hotel Solar. It has been found to pay off. Diplomatic and social existence is so much easier when you're breathing your own atmosphere and walking around under your normal gravity....

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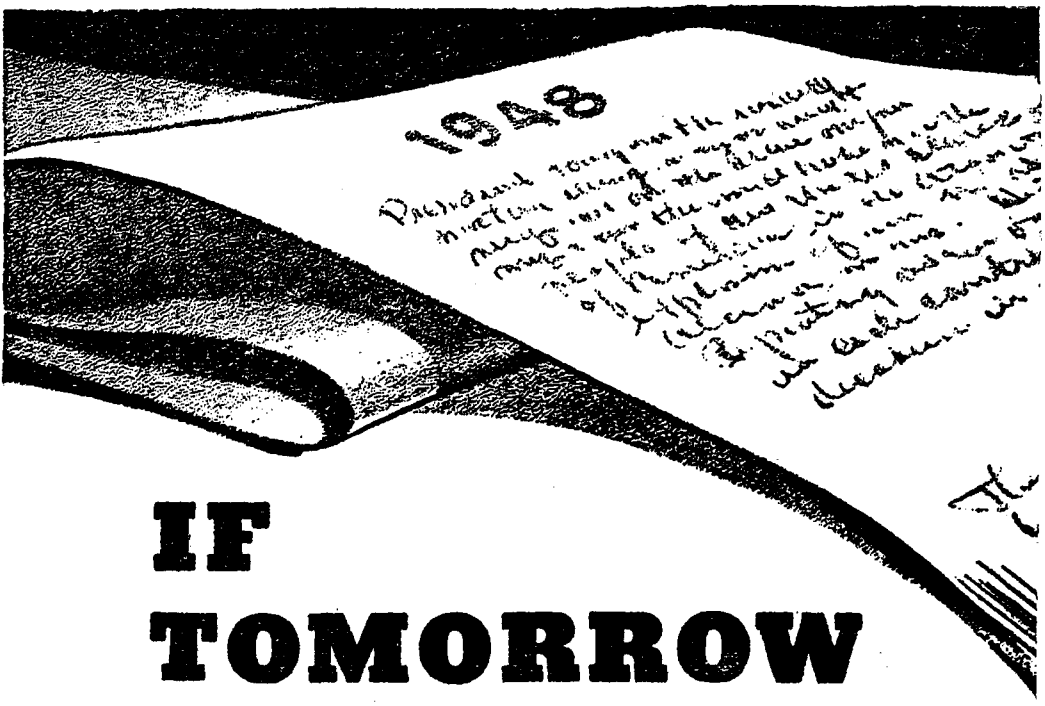

IF TOMORROW BE LOST

By Robert Ray

It was a strange sort of pencil; it had the power to write history before it happened—and even as it reached an end!

THE VOICE said, "David Archer!"

I halted in my stride and turned—and stared. A blind old man, clutching a pack of yellow pencils in his right hand, looked through me and beyond. His fine, broad forehead glistened in the morning sun. He had a short, white beard.

"You know me!" I gasped.

He replied, "I have the faculty of knowing only what I need to know, of hearing only what I need to hear, and seeing only what I need to see. You'd be amazed at the trouble one thus avoids."

"I don't get it," I sighed. "What do you want?"

"Buy a pencil!"

I was in a hurry to get back to the novel I was writing, but the blind man grasped the lapel of my coat. His breath hit me in the face. "Buy a pencil!"

"All right," I said, laughing a little. I dropped a dime into the tin

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As the hand poised to write again, the pencil exploded with a flash of radiance . . .

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cup he carried and reached for a pencil.

"Not that one," the pencil vendor murmured.

Without thinking I started to take a pencil other than the one my fingers had first grasped.

"Not that one, either," he reiterated softly.

I stared at him hard but his blind eyes continued to look through me blankly. My hand dropped. I asked, "Does it matter *which* pencil I take?" I was annoyed, but curious.

"You have to take the right one, or it won't work at all."

"What do you mean?"

"You'll find out."

"Look, my friend," I began slowly, "I'm in a hurry and you are confusing me with riddles..."

He wet his lips with his tongue, then burst out, "It has to be the right pencil, the right pencil, or the story won't be written!"

"Well, suppose you pick one for me," I said gently.

His bony fingers flicked over the yellow pencils. I waited. Then, suddenly, his face grew pale. "I'm afraid none of these pencils are for you," he whispered. "Please—please wait here!" He shuffled off in a stride amazingly swift for a blind man.

I stood watching his retreating figure. I had at first tagged him an old fool, but now—now I didn't know.

I bought a newspaper, glanced at the headline. Something about Russia. I turned to the editorial. More war talk. Then, in a short article some crackpot predicted war in six months. I shivered.

Someone touched my arm. The old man had returned. His lips and hands trembled. He was excited. "Here!" he exclaimed. He thrust a pencil into my hand. "Now go home and write!"

HE WAS gone before I realized it. I put the pencil into my coat pocket and returned to my room.

My typewriter, with clean, white sheets of paper beside it, was waiting for me. I was struggling through chapter five of my science fiction novel. I sat down to write. The words wouldn't come. Somehow, my heart wasn't in it. My novel concerned a newly-wed couple, separated from each other when the husband goes to Mars on a business trip. He drinks too much and flirts with the native girls. In chapter five the wife, suspicious, arrives on the scene—

A sheet of paper fluttered to the floor and I bent to pick it up. Something stabbed into my side. The pencil! Then, suddenly, I succumbed to the curiosity I had tried to shut out of my mind. I removed the pencil from my pocket and put a fresh sheet of paper before me. What should I write about? About a crazy old blind man who—

The point of a pencil touched the white paper. Suddenly, it darted across the paper, forming words! In swift, sure motions the pencil moved back and forth across the white sheet of paper! My fingers served merely to hold the pencil upright.

In five minutes the entire page was filled. The story unfolded was in reality a history, a history of the world beginning with the year 1948—!

I started to write on a second sheet of paper. The pencil took over. The point scurried across the paper like a tortured insect. My eyes devoured the words, and a horror began to grow within me. A third page filled swiftly, and then a fourth and a fifth. Here was history, a history of the future! An amazing pencil. It wrote on and on, yet none of the lead was used, nor did the point become dull.

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Only vaguely was I conscious that the day was passing. I forgot about lunch. The year 1949 was detailed. Someone had invented a more clever atomic bomb.

Then—I was several paragraphs into 1950—when the pencil ceased to write. I stared at it a moment, then pressed the point to the paper once again. Nothing happened. Not even the expected pencil mark. Nothing.

A terror gripped me. The pencil pounded into my brain.

There was nothing beyond the year 1950. *Nothing.*

THE END

HIJACK PATROL

★ By JUNE LURIE ★

FROM HIS vantage point on the bluff, Mark Weston surveyed the arrow-straight six-lane stretch of concrete that lanced straight east from Sonoma. It was an impressive sight. The night was pitch-black, but the concrete road shone brilliantly from the indirect lighting of the center-strip.

Mark touched the throttle and dropped the helicoptor down another five feet, effectively concealing himself. He kept the turbine at a slow idle, ready for instant motion.

He spoke into the microphone: "Weston, chief, at Spot five. No sign of the truckers yet."

"Relax, Mark," the soft-spoken voice came back. "Jamie and French, twenty miles back just noted them. There are four 1986 Wilson truck-trailers. They're doing ninety-five with turbines wide open. The minute you spot a 'Swooper', call for help. We're not playing heroes tonight. Got it?"

"Check," Mark said, and replaced the mike. He lit a cigarette concealing its glow in his cupped hand while he mused on the strange activities of the swoopers. Knowing that turbine trucks were running rich cargoes of consumer goods straight from California to New York along U.S.X. Highway Four, hijackers, using fleets of helicoptors were jumping the trucks, bringing them to a halt, whisking their cargoes somewhere to be disposed of to the proper fences. So far they hadn't been caught, but on a tip from a pigeon, the Highway Patrol was preparing to make an ambush of its own.

Trying to watch three thousand miles of concrete six-lane highways is not easy.

Suddenly Mark's ears caught the sound of turbines, the keen shrill whine of blowers. The trucks were coming by his station!

He watched their headlights climb over the slight grade. As they thundered by beneath him, he was impressed by the powerful cabs lugging trains of six and eight trailers almost exactly like the old railroad trains used to do. But these babies ran on rubber and they ran fast.

Abruptly Mark galvanized into action. He spat into the mike: "Got 'em chief! Caught the light! Send the boys!"

He gunned the helicopter. Before him was an amazing panorama. The truck-trailers were slowly braking to a stop. They had good reason to. Hanging above their cabs, were jet-black helicoptors, six-man jobs, and converging on them were dozens of heavier cargo jobs.

Mark gained altitude, garnering time until the swoop should be made upon the 'swoopers'. Completely unaware of the potential menace, the hijackers were already at work unloading the parked trucks. Mark could already see the road-block they had thrown up just in case there was some other vehicular traffic.

His speaker barked: "O.K. boys, jump 'em."

Mark sent the helicoptor into a long shallow dive, his nosegun pointed straight at the cluster of men and machines. The truck-drivers were already dead, he knew. The swoopers operated completely cold-bloodedly.

Pin-points of light told him, the patrol was coming up. He touched the firing stud. The twenty-millimeter stuttered. A rain of explosive shells burst into the cluttered melange. Mark could hear the screaming as he made his first pass, and strange whistles followed him. The bandits were shooting back.

But the fight was out of them. Mark's accurate pass had cut them into demoralized ribbons, and had blasted a dozen 'coptors into wrecks of crumpled sheet-metal.

The patrol was approaching from every direction and the hijackers began to see the light. Gunfire seized and Mark interrupted his second pass. There was no use in senseless slaughter especially when the Patrol needed information so badly.

The raid took in two hundred men counting the forty dead from gunfire.

"There will be no hell-raising with transports on Highway Four," the chief said, "at least not any more..."

★ ★ ★

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THE MAN WHO

By Paul Lohrman

As the switch was thrown the condemned man jerked with the powerful flow of current—and he laughed uproariously...

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WOULD NOT BURN

The condemned man had been placed in the chair and the switch had been thrown. And yet, somehow, he continued to live . . .

I'M NICK DALLAS, mister. Hold it now! Don't say a word! Don't even turn your head. Just stand there and drink your beer and I'll stand here beside you and talk. I don't feel like a beer right now. That's why I ain't ordering any. I feel too good to be swilling down any of that stuff. Too happy, because I did something nobody else in history ever did and all I want to do now is tell somebody about it.

Me—I'm Nicky Dallas—the guy who beat the chair!

That's the truth, mister. The story'll be in all the papers—the early editions. They're probably hitting the street right now with big front page spreads telling all about it. But I'm giving you a break. You're going to get the story ahead of everybody except the reporters and the ghouls that creep into the death house to witness an execution. You're getting the break because I want to talk. I want to tell somebody about it, so here goes.

You know who I am of course. Everybody in the country's read about Nicky Dallas. Gangster, mobster, hoodlum—what the hell! Names never hurt anybody. Me—I let them call me anything they wanted to as long as they let my rackets alone and the dough kept rolling in. I'm no fool. When the papers start putting names on a guy like me, it means he's in, brother! He's tops! It shows he's got the politicos eating at his trough and all the doors locked and the law's plain scared of him. When the papers sound off its proof you're in the big time. That's me, Nicky Dallas, with the South Side right in the palm of my hand and sucker money hanging out of every pocket. That's the way it was anyway, and it'll be that way again.

It was that way until I got the rotten break—until Lippy Tyler got rubbed out. You know all about that like everybody else. It was in all the papers. Them damn rags went type-happy as soon as the law got me over the barrel.

Of course I yelled bum rap right from the beginning. I'd have been a damn fool not to. But I'll give you the straight dope on the whole thing now. I'll even tell the papers and man how I'll laugh! You see I got them where the hair's short now. I was sentenced to be electrocuted and they carried out the sentence and I figured out a way to beat them and it worked! So I'm a free man now. You can't be put over the barrel twice for the same crime so I can tell all about bumping Tyler and laugh right out loud in public.

You see Lippy was moving in on

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me. He got him some tough boys and he took over the Lido Club and then got real cocky, thinking he was in the saddle and I was scared or something. The damn fool! He should have known better. If he'd had any brains he'd have headed for China. But he stuck around and so I and my boys hauled him down in the basement and give him a hard time just for the fun of it. After that we done him a favor by bumping him. He wasn't no good for anything else.

But then there was that fool janitor. And a very cagey D.A. keeping him under wraps 'til it was too late for my boys to get at him. After he testified I was in hot water and I and my mouthpieces knew it. They're smart cookies, them lawyers and they sure hauled out all the neat tricks. Technicalities, legal cuties, and big medicos claiming I was nuts. We paid plenty for them big-name doctors who were willing to take our dough because who could prove them wrong?

But I got tough breaks all along the line. Nothing worked. The papers yammering for my blood and that damn janitor cocky as all hell because the D.A. kept a twenty-four hour guard over him.

By the way. That's something I ain't forgetting. That janitor. I'm going to take care of him personal. When I'm through with him I think he'll be kind of sorry for railroading me.

So far I ain't told you nothing you don't already know. It was in all the papers how the governor turned down the appeal. Cripes! I thought the damn sheets would bust a gut with pure joy! Headlines a foot high:

NICK DALLAS HEADED FOR CHAIR

You know all about that, but now comes the stuff you *don't* know. The deep stuff that even the reporters ain't in on. The low-down on how I did it! How I beat the rap!

YOU SEE I ain't as stupid as some people let on. That is I ain't the illiterate type. I went through grade school and I've done a lot of reading in my time. And sitting there in the death house all those months made me think real deep.

After all, I don't any more want to get bumped off than the next guy and maybe that's what made me remember something. A book I read once. It was all about some very smart characters over in India—yogis they call them—and when I first read it I thought it was a lot of guff. But I got to thinking there in death row.

These yogis, as I said, are pretty brainy. It's some kind of a religion or something, but it's right down in books, in black and white, how they've got control over life and death. According to the books, you couldn't bump a yogi if you tried! They've learned how to make chumps out of anybody that says you've got to die sometime. The good ones have been alive for hundreds of years, some of them and they claim the human body and the human mind is all-powerful; that if you know the tricks—the right way to breathe and how to concentrate, you can overcome anything.

You see it all has to do with vibrations—that's the secret. You learn how to raise and lower the vibrations in your body—that's the wave-length, kind of. Everything has a wave-length and it can be raised and lowered by working your mind right. Your mind is the boss. That's the highest rate of vibration there is.

Anyway, I remembered these yogis and so I sent out for all the books ever written about them. Some of the books weren't so good, but I kept digging until I found what I wanted—the real thing; a book that told you all about how to do it. Then I went

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to work on my plan.

There's a hell of a lot to it, but when you got the chair staring you in the face you can study pretty fast, brother what I mean. I ate that stuff up. When I wasn't reading I was working—doing the exercises—breathing like they said to—sitting for hours without moving a muscle so as to have complete control of my body. What I had to do was learn to raise the rate of vibration in my body until it was higher than the charge of electricity the state was planning to toss through me.

I worked like a dog and you know, it's funny. Funny I mean how the harder you work the easier things get. I got complete control of my body pretty quick. I got so I could have twisted it, like they said in the books, into the damndest positions you ever saw. What I mean, chum, I got *control*. And before too long I realized I was on top. I could beat the thing. I could raise my vibrations up to where I knew that electricity was going to slide through me like water through a leaky bucket. I was willing to bet it wouldn't even tickle!

Brother, I'm telling you—these yogis are the real thing. They know so much more than we do that it makes us out a pack of idiots. They tell you what to do and you do it and it works!

So that's the way it was in the death cell. I got so I'd sit on the floor with my legs practically tied in a bow knot for hours just because I liked it—because it made my mind clear and I could be happy thinking what a chump I was going to make of John Law.

So comes time for the execution and I'm laughing while they're shaving my head. The reporters are writing up how I'm a pretty brave guy at that—not needing a shot in the arm or anything like that to help me face the chair. Then comes the warden to lead the way to the hot squat and I follow right along behind him like we're heading for a high-stakes poker game.

THE GHOULS are already in their chairs when we get to the room. They come in through a side door from the prison areaway and a cop has already locked the door and is standing beside it.

The chair itself is all polished up and waiting. There's two doctors standing by with stethoscopes hanging around their necks. The guards are in place and everything's ready.

So am I. The warden leads me over to the chair and every man in the place is watching to see if I fall on my puss and start yelling for mercy. I laugh at them. I sit down in the chair and tell them let's get going.

They strap me in and I figure—this is it. But there's no doubt in my mind—no worry about what's going to happen, because that's part of what the yogis tell you—have confidence—don't worry about a thing—everything's going to be all right.

Comes the payoff—the warden's hand on the switch with me strapped in that chair like I was part of it.

But I was concentrating. I had my vibrations up where they belonged—higher than the vibrations of the electricity and then the juice came singing through with all the ghouls staring.

It felt like somebody stroking the back of my neck. That was all. I'd beaten it! By God I *had*! The jolt didn't have any more effect on me than a sock in the face with a cream-puff. The yogi books paid off! I sat there and grinned at the warden.

You could see it on them—all of them. They were dumbfounded. They couldn't talk or open their mouths. They'd never seen anything like this

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before—a guy who could sit in the chair and take everything it had and sit there grinning at them. The warden, goggling like a fish, threw open the switch and the medicos stumbled over to the chair and slapped their ear-hooks onto my chest. I could see the goofy look in their eyes when they found my pump ticking away like it was good for fifty years yet.

They backed off and the warden clawed at the switch again. Same result. Stetho—heart still pumping—back away—throw in the switch.

After the third try they were licked. They didn't know what the hell to do. The medicos checked my heart and backed away and the warden stumbled over to the chair and made some helpless gestures. They unstrapped me and I could see the warden was wondering what next? What did you do with a guy you couldn't electrocute?

I stood up and rubbed my wrists while the newspapermen and the witnesses sat like statues. I grinned and walked over to the areaway door. I didn't have to say anything to the guard. His face was frozen and he reached up and unlocked the door like a man in a dream and I could see just what he was thinking.

A guy you couldn't electrocute! What *about* that!

I laughed in his face and walked out into the street a free man. And then—

Hey! Wait a minute! What you walking away for? I ain't finished yet. That's the way it's been ever since I walked out that prison door. I got a great story and every guy I talk to walks away!

WHY THE HELL WON'T SOMEBODY LISTEN TO ME?

THE END

THE SPECULATING SPECTROSCOPE

★ By MILTON MATTHEW ★

SPECTROSCOPIC analysis is an extremely important part of modern technology. Most of you are familiar with it through the simple chemical laboratory experiment of observing the characteristic colors associated with sodium, potassium, etc. You hold a bit of salt in a Bunsen burner flame and the flame is colored a brilliant yellow. Do the same with potassium and the flame is a pronounced violet; do it with ceasium and the flame is red; do it with strontium and the flame is green.

Not so well known is the fact that these spectra (continuous, they're called) can be separated into definite lines of definite relative intensity. This means that with a suitable instrument, a spectroscope consisting of a prism and a slit, it is possible not only to identify given elements but also to determine the relative quantities in the sample.

Using spectroscopes, chemists have at hand an instantaneous chemical analyzer. All you do is shove the specimen to be analyzed (say a hunk of steel from an alloy steel sample in a steel mill) in the flame of a pure carbon arc light. Examine through the spectroscope and compare with calibrated charts. Presto! At once you have the materials and their amounts.

This clean simple method of analysis has much to recommend it. And it is being widely used. Obviously it dispenses with the elaborate glass concoctions of the typical chemist and it is just as accurate.

The amateur astronomers (telescopic nuts) whom we've discussed before in these pages, have now taken up amateur spectroscopy. This might be expected. To make a good spectroscope is a matter of fine optical and mechanical work. The amateurs can do just that. So they go ahead and install their gratings and prisms, manufacture the very narrow slit necessary and they've got an instrument a professional wouldn't be ashamed of.

The point of all this is that like typical enthusiastic Americans, when they want something done, the amateurs go ahead and do it without worrying about whether or not it is too hard. Spectroscopy has always been considered a rather refined science. Now that the amateurs have their hands in it, we suspect that it's going to become considerably more commonplace.

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"TWINKLE, TWINKLE, LITTLE EYE . . ."

★ By RAMSEY SINCLAIR ★

IT'S FUNNY how long-cherished notions are suddenly booted from our possession. Or more commonly, how we accept explanations without really questioning them.

What child hasn't asked, "Daddy, why do the stars twinkle?"

The answer given may range from the world of fairyland to a scientific optical theory depending on the child and the father. But most people are familiar with the long-accepted explanation that stars twinkle because the density and optical properties of the air are altered by disturbances due to heat and wind. This has long been agreed upon.

But along comes a British authority on vision who challenges and fairly evidently disproves the idea. The stars twinkle, he states, not in the failings of the atmosphere, but in the peculiarities of the eye!

His theory is this: the eye consists of light-sensitive rods and cones, not all of which are equally perceptive or sensitive to light intensities. Also the eye never remains precisely fixed for any length of time. It shifts from one point to another in a period of about a tenth of a second. This "jerkiness" gives us the impression of twinkling.

To test this, the scientist observed twinkling objects through the telescope. He noted that the twinkling ceased when more light was thus brought to the eye. He turned the instrument on light bulbs at a distance which also appeared to twinkle. Under the telescope the twinkling ceased.

A check with photo-electric cells seemed to confirm this.

Astronomers however still realize that the air *does* affect what they call the "seeing"—the quality of observing. Consequently the twinkling of the stars probably is due to both causes. It lies both in the air and in the eye.

"Twinkle, twinkle, little eye..."

★ ★ ★

EXAGGERATION...

★ By J. R. MARKS ★

IF AND WHEN it comes—God forbid—the Third World War will be Man's greatest folly. Between guided missiles, atomic bombs, radioactive dusts, and bacteriological warfare, it seems as if Man is doomed to blot himself from the face of the Earth.

But a few voices—evidently trying to be encouraging—are pointing out that as bad as such a war may be, it won't destroy Mankind completely any more than the last two have—but it will leave incredible desolation in its wake. It will set back the slow climb to civilization—it will make it even slower.

Maybe it would be better, some cynics cry, if Man were to destroy himself completely. That however is for the philosophers to speculate on. Whatever happens, it will be a strangely changed universe.

The thing that most people don't understand and that the economists never seem to explain in spite of all their technical terminology is this: if men can withstand such costly wars, which in terms of lives, money and materials, are incalculably great, why can't they use the same intensive effort towards peaceful ends? Thinking in those terms, the horrors of a third World War can't be exaggerated. Just imagine what such a constructive effort could mean...

METEOR?

★ By A. MORRIS ★

DR. GRABLE said: "...and anyhow, Bill, the farmer brought it in. Take a look at it."

Bill Armstrong walked along the corridor of the museum with his friend Dr. Grable, the curator toward the hall where meteors and meteoric specimens were exhibited.

Dr. Grable paused before the specimen. It was still resting on a massive dolly for despite its small size—about three feet in diameter—it was of nickel iron obviously.

"There it is, Bill. Looks like a plain meteorite to me. The farmer said I should cut it open. He swears it rose ten feet in the air after it hit, floated around and then settled back. If the man isn't nuts, I'll eat the meteorite. It's a plain nickel-iron job—kind of big for such a type—but still a plain meteorite."

"I thought there'd be a story in it," Bill said, "at least from what the farmer said on the 'phone, but it looks like another case of hallucination."

He examined it closely. It was a mass of gnarled and twisted metal, with the rough porous surface always seen on meteorites. He straightened up and said: "O.K. Doc, let's go. I've seen enough."

The two men walked away...and behind them...the meteorite shifted ever so slightly on its pallet...

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The MECHANICAL

"HEY, 'Mocky'. C'mere—" The thick-set figure in the nondescript clothes paused on his way to the rear and looked at the bartender. The bartender jerked his head and the man called Mocky moved to the bar.

"What d'ya want?"

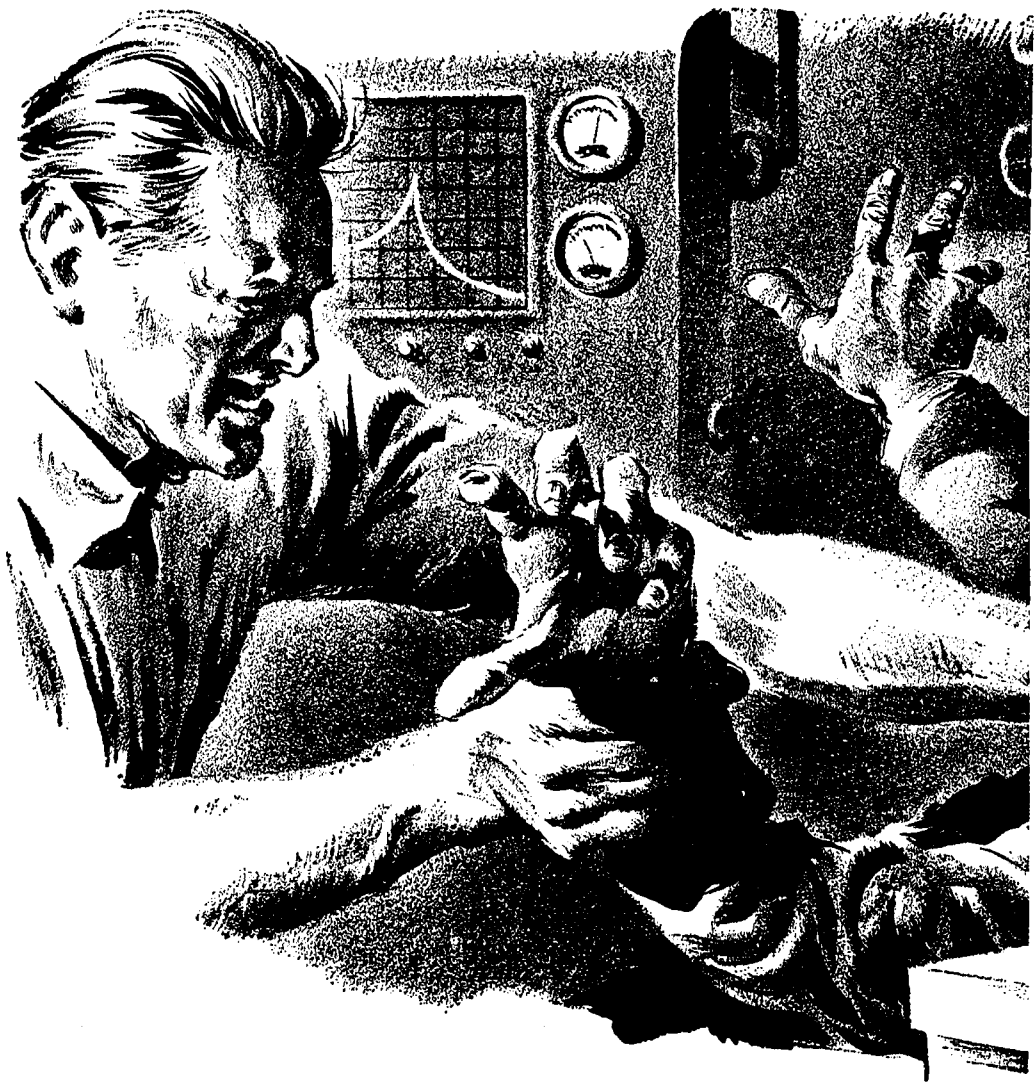
"I got a job for you."

"Shove it! The last time you gave me a job you paid me off in money."

"That's bad?"

"So every guy on Madison Street hears Mocky's got fresh and makes me 'fore I get a block from the joint."

The bartender laughed until he



The jagged edges of the broken bottle slashed deeply into the soft flesh...

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GENIUS

By Gilbert Grant

The theory of the machine was perfect and so were the plans to build it. That's why it took a special genius to thwart it.

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choked on it. "Yeah. I heard about it. The mooch gets mooched. Okay! All you can drink for tonight and two fifths when you leave."

"What's the matter? You crazy or sumpin'? Or maybe you think I lost my marbles? I get stiff and blow out of here. And when I come back tomorrow you tell me you gave me the two fifths; that maybe I got rolled for 'em on the way to the flop. You oughta know better'n try that on Mocky. Write it out an' I'll stash the note."

"What makes you so hard to get along with?" the bartender was suddenly irritated. If it weren't that he needed the refrigerator... "Okay. The refrigerator's broke."

"So give me a wrench and a screwdriver and I'll fix it," Mocky said.

* * *

The elderly man with the shock of snow-white hair left his seat at the table and found another at the bar.

"A beer, please," he said to the bartender. He waited until he was served, then said, "Interesting character, that Mocky."

"A bum," the bartender said. He sucked noisily at some food caught in his molars, reached for the serving fork and used one of the tines to pry the particles loose. Wiping the fork on his stained apron, he put it back on the food counter. "A bum," he said shortly.

"So I observed. A bum of, shall we say, talents, however?"

"You're saying it. What's so smart about Mocky?"

"A screwdriver and a wrench to fix the refrigerator. That requires talent. Mechanical talent."

"Yeah. Guess it does. Hm! Never thought of Mocky that way. A genius, huh? Fill 'er up?"

The elderly man looked down at the glass, smiled and told the bartender to go ahead. He resumed after downing half the glass: "How is it that Mocky doesn't work for a living? Or does he?"

THE BARTENDER looked his disgust. Another character. Always characters. Always questions. A guy'd think these bums was the reason the world went around, the way people worried about 'em. "Look, mister. I ain't interested in guys like Mocky. They come in and I wait on 'em. If they got the fresh. If they ain't I t'row 'em out. See? So all right. Maybe Mocky's a little different. Maybe he works odd jobs once in a while. Like fixin' my fans when they go haywire, or the refrigerator or somethin' like that. But that's as far as it goes. Next time he comes in he gotta lay it on the counter, just like the next guy. See?"

"I see," the other said mildly. "Aah! Done already—"

Mocky was coming from behind the far end of the bar. He was shaking his head. He threw the wrench and screwdriver on the counter and growled:

"Fixed. Benny, listen. It's got a short. There ain't no place open now an' I need some wire. It'll run till morning anyway. But don't let it go after that—"

"Three minutes," the white-haired stranger said to himself. "Unbelievable. Uh—Mocky!" the last was aloud.

The bum turned sullen eyes his way.

"I'd like to buy you a drink, Mocky," the stranger said.

"Yeah. Okay. Shot an' beer, Benny," Mocky said as he perched himself beside the white-haired man. He downed the shot in a single gulp, swallowed the beer in two gulps and wiped his mouth on a grease-stained sleeve. "So-o?"

"My name is Finster," the stranger

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said. "Doctor Hugo Finster. I'd like to talk to you, privately."

Mocky turned, saw a free table along the rear wall and moved to it. The elderly man seated himself across from him, gestured for Benny to serve them drinks, waited until Mocky swallowed his and said:

"That's an odd name."

"Benny gave it to me. In his language it means curse."

"I see. Well, Mocky, I have a proposition for you. I want you to do some work for me. I'll pay you well."

"Doin' what? Rollin' pills maybe? Nah! You got me wrong, doc. I'm a mechanic."

"The best I've ever seen," Finster said. "The work is mechanical in nature."

"A real quack, eh, doc? Got one o' those electric gadgets, huh? Cures everything with it. I fixed one for a quack on Wells Street once. Tells me he's short, after I do the job. So I tell him I ain't through. I fix the gadget but good. Gees! I'll bet his next patient hit the roof when the quack puts the switch on— Nope. No dice."

"I can pay you well. Money. More than you'd know what to do with. Or . . . whiskey! Cases of it. Don't decide now. Here's my card. I'll be in all day tomorrow—"

The last Finster heard as he stepped through the door of the skid row saloon was:

"—Hey, Benny! Start payin' off—"

THE SHAPELESS cap was shoved back and a blunt finger scratched at the mop of unruly hair. A thick under lip folded over the upper as sullen dark eyes looked up at the enamelled number marker over the door. Mocky brought the card out again and read the address aloud: "1844 Mc Carn Court. Guess this is it, all right—let's try the bell."

A tall wide-shouldered man answered the door to Mocky's ring. He studied the unshaven face, the sullen eyes, the clothes, of which no piece matched any other, with narrowed speculative glance. The voice of Doctor Finster was heard from the rear somewhere. It came closer and louder:

"Who is it, Howard? The man I was telling you about— Aah! Mocky! Come in. Come in."

"This the genius you were telling me about, doctor?" the tall man asked. He had an odd voice, colorless, unemotional and pitched on a single level. "Hm! I hope you're right."

"Never more so, Howard. Come along, Mocky. Let me show you our workshop. Tell me. What do you think of it?"

Mocky looked about with small interest. What he wanted at that moment was a drink. Maybe the doc had one. . . . He cleared his throat. "Doc. . Uh. It was a tough night—"

"I understand," Finster said. He stepped to a cabinet close by an immense retort, opened it and brought out a bottle. He nodded for Mocky to come over and when the other did so handed him the bottle. "Go ahead, Mocky," he said. "As much as you want."

A third of the bottle was gone when Mocky returned it. He wiped his mouth on his coat sleeve, sighed and said: "Thanks! I needed it. Uh, you got a boy, doc. Where's the gadget?"

"In due time. I think I'd better explain something first. What we're doing is very important. Very. The whole world can be changed because of it, Mocky. Understand? No. That would be *too* much to expect of you. Mr. Blanchard—Howard—is putting up all the money I'll need. He's my partner. Now—I'll want you to live here. I've fixed up a room for you in

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back. You can have one day off, any day you want. I'll trust you to come back the day after you've been off."

"A day off. Why? He'll never show back again," Blanchard said. It was odd to hear the vehement words, without inflection, without emotion.

"I trust him," Finster said simply. "I have faith in him."

"Faith in—that! He's a drunkard. You saw how he hit the bottle. A derelict, a weakling. How can you have faith in him?"

"This problem has taken thirty years of my life," Finster said. "How long could I have gone on without faith? It's something you can't explain. Just as I can't explain my faith in Mocky. It's just there, that's all."

"Oh. Very well. But still he should receive no day off. This work is too important. Too much hinges on it."

"When a man becomes a slave to a machine he gets to hate it. One day a week off, Howard. Understand?"

"As you wish." Blanchard looked at his watch. "I must be on my way. See you in a couple of days. 'Bye—"

"I don't like that character," Mocky said as the door closed on the other. "He's a cold fish, a wrongo."

"He is a cold fish, all right," Finster said. "But he came to me with his offer of help when I was about ready to give up. And he understands its importance."

"The guy sounds like a foreigner," Mocky went on. It was obvious he was pursuing a thought to its end. "Never heard no American talk like that."

"Hm. Perhaps. I've never given it thought, one way or another. No matter. Now, Mocky. Here's our problem—"

Most of it was in one ear and out the other. There was something about unseen waves in the air. Cosmic Waves, Finster called them; he was going to capture them in this machine they were going to build. The machine was going to be the size of a single horse-power motor. Mocky was going to build the machine by hand with tools and parts furnished by the doctor.

"—There's a completely fitted machine shop in the basement. Come along and I'll show you the designs I made. You'll have to follow them. It will be up to you to make them work," Finster said in conclusion. "Perhaps you don't know it, Mocky. But I think you're a mechanical genius—"

"Where the hell have you been?" Benny asked as he slid a shot glass over and filled the beer for Mocky's chaser. "Hey! You been on the wagon or sumpin? You look different."

"Got a job," Mocky replied.

"That one's on me," Benny said. "You buy the next."

"I can buy this one, too."

"It's your money. Buy all you want."

THE GUY *does* look different, Benny reflected silently as he rang up the money. He was almost afraid to think the word for it—respectable—and yet there wasn't much to go on. The clothes still did not match, neither pants to jacket, and the vest was still too small. Maybe it was the clean-shaven face, maybe the light in the bum's eyes. Yeah. That was it. The guy was sure of himself, all of a sudden.

"Good job? Money in it?" Benny probed as he refilled both glasses.

Mocky cocked his head to one side and stared levelly at the other. "Benny. How come you been workin' all these years for your boss?"

"He's a right guy, that's how come. He don't hang over the bar peeping at the till to see I ring up every beer. I close when I think it's time and I

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run this place the way I want. And that's the way he likes it. That's how come."

"So the money ain't got nothin' to do with it. Okay. You got your answer. Now give me another shot an beer an' I'll blow for a while. I got to get somethin'."

It was his first day off. Oddly, he didn't feel like drinking. There was a certain kind of pliers he wanted to get. He decided to pick them up at the hardware store on the corner. He walked out of the store into the lunch-hour crowd and was moved along with them. Quite suddenly he wanted to return to the old man and his machine. He edged his way out of the crowd, leaned against an El pillar and waited for a street car.

It was strange, he thought, how the little old guy could get under a guy's skin. He growled laughter in his throat. *Mocky the mooch. Mocky the mechanical genius. That was a laugh. Or was it? The old guy sure had faith. The first time anyone's ever had that in you—*

"—It will not be long, now," the words drifted past him. He looked up, startled out of his revery. Two men were walking away from him. One was tall, wide of shoulder; the other, short and fat. Mocky caught a swift glimpse of a flat-featured face, pale as suet, with heavy beetling brows.

It was Howard Blanchard.

Abruptly Mocky changed his mind about returning. Old habits returned. He sidled along, taking advantage of every window lobby, every El pillar. They were easy to follow. Straight down Van Buren to Franklin. And south on Franklin half a block.

Mocky looked up at the shabby building the two men had entered. He knew the neighborhood, the kind of business many of these buildings contained, the sort of people who were in business. Third rate dress manufacturers, shabby millinery houses, hall lofts that were bare except for the long desks at which men sat with telephone head sets, calling numbers from lists at their finger tips, calling bookies, calling everything not legitimate.

There would be a single elevator, usually beyond the stairwell. He made his mind up instantly. They couldn't be much ahead of him. They were just entering the elevator. He flew up the stairs, three at a time and peered around the corner on the second floor. Light showed for an instant and went past. Again the stairs. This time the door opened.

He watched them until they stepped into a door near the far end of the corridor. He knelt and listened intently. Now and then he caught a hoarse, gutteral phrase and a reply in monotone. It was Blanchard's voice. But he couldn't hear a single word Blanchard spoke. Only some of the words the fat man used:

"—Goot! Maybe another week, hah—? —We must be patient—So. One is old, the other weak—"

Mocky rose quickly at the sound of the elevator's return. Three men got off and one held the door open for Mocky. He stepped into the elevator and pressed the first floor button....

"DOC! I'M not giving you bull. This guy Blanchard's a wrong guy. I followed them—"

The old man kept shaking his head. Anger made his voice go up: "Don't you see how wrong you are, Mocky?" he asked. "You didn't like Blanchard from the first. So you see him walking with a man who sounds suspicious to you. I can't believe it!"

What Mocky couldn't understand was that he was rocking the boat of faith for the other. He was blind to

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everything but Finster's danger. "Yeah," he grunted sourly. "Him against me. No wonder I don't show. A drunk from skid row. Okay, doc. Even an alley mechanic can finish the job now. You paid me in money so I'll be okay. One thing. Blanchard's a wrongie. Just keep that in mind—"

"Mocky. Wait!" Finster put his hand on the other's arm as Mocky turned toward the door. "I need you. Don't you understand? You proved something—"

Mocky pulled free and walked out. His eyes were bitter and hurt lay deep in them. He did not look back. . . .

"How long's this going to go on?" Benny asked. "Two nights and this is the third day."

"Wha's the matter? Ain't I been payin' for the drinks?" Mocky asked. He needed a shave and grease and the dregs of wine and whiskey stained his clothes. He had an elbow propped on the bar and he rested his cheek in a palm. Now and then the hand would slip off and he would barely catch himself from slamming against the walnut. "So, don't bother me!"

" 'S all right with me," Benny said. He turned suddenly at the sound of angry voices from the other end of the bar. He was over the bar in a vaulting leap and running toward the two men who had suddenly begun to swing at one another. One of them had slammed a beer stein against the edge of the bar and was using it as a pronged blade.

He turned on Benny and swung with the broken edge of glass. But Benny ducked the blow with an agility that belied his paunch and weight and drove a powerhouse right to the man's belly. Another to the back of the head and the man fell flat on his face. Benny dragged him to the door and threw him out into the gutter.

"Drunks, fights, jerks!" Benny was muttering as he returned to Mocky.

"Benny," Mocky said in an oddly quiet voice, "why do you take chances like that? He might have cut you bad. There's a cop walking alla time outside."

"Boss says no fights. That makes it no fights. See?"

"You'd go that far for the boss?" Mocky asked in the same quiet tones. He was suddenly no longer drunk.

"A right guy. That's the boss. I go all the way for a right guy. See?"

"Yeah! I see. Mocky, the wise guy. And the old man said he needed me. Benny. You don't know it but you just steered me level. Thanks."

"Bums. Always bums," Benny mumbled as he watched Mocky step through the door. "Characters. That's what come in here—"

THERE WERE no words of greeting. Just the old man's fingers pressing Mocky's. And the brightness of the old man's eyes. It was enough. They understood each other.

"Hey!" Mocky said in surprise. "How come you didn't get someone to finish it?"

"I knew you'd return."

"Ohh. Okay. Back to work. Uh. I think we'll hook in the whatchamacallit. I think I got it licked 'fore I left."

"The screenerator?"

"Yeah! Now here's what you do, doc—"

The two looked at each other and smiled widely. A low hum filled the room. It was the hum of power greater than any man had ever known.

"A motor that size," Finster couldn't keep the awe from his voice, "could run the Queen Mary."

"Is that good?" Mocky asked.

"There is nothing better. I'm going to call Howard. He'll want to see it."

The smile went away from Mocky's lips. A guarded look appeared in his

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eyes. "Better wait, doc," he said. "Let me work out the rough spots tonight. There's still some an' you don't want it to go bad when Blanchard is here. Tomorrow night'll be good enough too."

"I suppose you're right. You're staying the night, then?"

"Yeah. Might take all night. Go on to bed, doc. I won't need you."

The door had barely closed and Mocky was at work. Swiftly, with marvelously sensitive fingers, Mocky toiled for an hour. When he was through he flicked the switch. The motor came on with smooth humming sound. Mocky smiled and put everything away—

Howard Blanchard was paler than ever. Oddly nervous, too. His tongue kept licking his lips, and he kept wiping his hands along the sides of his trousers.

"Finished, eh?" he said in an almost inaudible voice. "And it works, eh?" There was an odd spark of something far back in the flat expressionless eyes.

"As I planned it to," Doctor Hugo Finster was proud. He patted the black metal of the motor as though he were petting flesh. He turned to Mocky, seated in a corner, a glass of beer in one hand, and continued: "There is the one to thank and congratulate. The derelict, as you once called him. He is the one who should wear the laurels. Were it not for him—"

"Yes. Yes," Blanchard broke in. "You have told me. More than once, doctor. If you will excuse me. There is a friend who is stopping off here to pick me up—"

There were three of them. Ugly, snub-nosed pistols were in each palm. The guns were leveled at the two others in the room.

"Howard! What does this mean?" Finster demanded. His voice was hard, without fear.

MOCKY'S EYES were bright and watchful. He sipped at the beer slowly and looked from one to another of the three. He recognized one, the fat, chunky man who had gone into the Franklin Street building with Blanchard. The third one also became clear. He was the man who had held the elevator door open for him. The third one recognized Mocky.

"I know that one," he said. "He was waiting for the elevator one day when Boris and Peter and I stepped out of it."

"So-o," Blanchard said, advancing on Mocky. "A genius, and a snooper too. Here. For your trouble, my curious friend..."

Mocky tumbled from the box he was on. Blood streamed from a long cut on his cheek. Blanchard looked down at him and smiled shallowly. He lifted his foot to kick Mocky and the fat man said:

"No! He is the mechanic. We may need him. Tomas. Throw some water in his face."

The lights wouldn't hold still. And the room was full of people, the same ones, in triplicate. Then Mocky's brain cleared and he found things in focus again. He felt the wetness dribbling down his cheek and it smarted.

"Lay the rod down, you jerk—" he growled.

"Be quiet," the fat man said sharply. "You," he jerked the gun toward Mocky. "Start the motor."

"No!" Finster threw the word from him. "Don't do it!"

"Don't worry, doc," Mocky said quietly. "They ain't big enough to make me."

"Do not fool yourself, my friend," the fat one said. He seemed to be the

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leader. "We have the time and the size. We tried the switch. While you were on the floor. Nothing happened. Georgi says it worked a while ago. What did you do?"

Mocky shrugged his shoulders in a faint lift. His lips held a crooked smile. "Nothin'. It worked then. Should work now."

Hoarse laughter bubbled from the fat man's throat. Mocky felt a chill take hold of him at the sound.

"American fools. Brave men, smart men, and always foolish men. You think we will stop at anything to get this? This little motor will rule the world. We will build hundreds of them. Georgi. Get those pliers and bring them to me— I promise you," the fat man said moving the pliers back and forth before Mocky's eyes, "that if you don't produce the missing part I will pull the old man's tongue out by the roots."

"Listen to me," Finster broke in. He was calm, unhurried, resigned. "It doesn't matter what they do to me, Mocky. I'm done. The motor's the important thing. To you, and our country— O-oh," he sighed and slumped forward as one of them hit him with the barrel of the gun.

"Wait!" Mocky said sharply. "One thing. Promise to let the old man go. And I'll fix the motor."

"My word," the fat man said.

"Okay." Mocky walked to the motor, turned his back to them, fiddled with it for a second and snapped the switch on. The motor's hum filled the room with sound.

"It works! It works," the fat man crowed triumphantly. "Georgi! They will reward you greatly for this. Now. Get rid of these two fools. But without noise—"

Mocky didn't wait for them to start. The beer glass lay at his feet where it had fallen when Blanchard slugged him with the gun. Swooping it from the floor in a swift move he smashed it against the edge of the table and leaped forward toward the man who was bent above the unconscious figure of the old man.

The man screamed wildly as the ragged edge of glass tore into his throat. Then there was only the choking sound of his gasping breath as his blood poured from the gaping serrated wound.

Something exploded alongside of Mocky's head. He went to his knees. A pair of legs were before him. Blindly, wildly, he grabbed them and twisted. Someone plunged headlong and Mocky wrapped his arms about the man. It was Blanchard.

Mocky butted with his head and felt it strike the other's chin and felt a thrill at the sound of the broken gasp. He shoved hard again and felt the blow strike.

Damn, he thought dumbly. *If I could only get up. Then I could take care of this jerk behind me.*

Something was beating a tattoo on the back of his head. There was a loud, drumming noise, voices, and suddenly everything faded behind an ebony curtain—

"SO YOU GOT here?" Mocky asked weakly. "Just in time. How's the doc?"

"He'll be all right," the F. B. I. man said. Mocky noted how alike they seemed, these quiet men who had come just in time. There were a half dozen of them. Conservative in dress, quiet in manner, efficient in their work. "Just a glancing blow. Aah! Easy, sir. That's better."

"Wha-what happened?" the old man asked. He leaned weakly against the Federal agent.

"Your friend notified the office a couple of days ago that he suspected

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spies at work. He told us of your work and we thought it important enough to look into. He was right. He called us late last night to tell us that one of the men would be here tonight. We saw them enter, made sure all exits were guarded and moved in."

"I—I almost lost it at the last moment, didn't I, my friend? I could hear the motor start. My world was falling apart. First Blanchard, then you. I suppose I should have known better. You couldn't have failed me, Mocky."

"Aah, doc! You shoulda known better. I was stringin' them along figgerin' the Feds'd come in any second. But when they started on you. Well—"

"Yet I heard the motor start," the old man said. Abruptly he passed a hand across his brow. The man holding him looked closely at him. A weak smile appeared on Finster's lips. "I'm all right. Too much excitement, I guess. I've got to know what happened before you take me to a physician. You started the motor, Mocky—"

"Sure. Hell! They could have taken it for all the difference it made. Or bought one at Sears. Done the same thing. Don't forget, doc. You said I was a mechanical genius. Had to prove it. Took the motor apart last night and put it together again. Only there were some important parts missing. Easy, eh?"

The old man shook his head weakly. The man holding him said, "I guess we'd better get along, sir."

"Mocky—" the old man turned his head.

"Don't worry, doc. I'll be around. This is one curse you won't be rid of fast. But right now I'd like a drink."

"I guess it's all right," the head of the squad said. "That cut isn't bad. A couple of bumps. Go on. Don't forget. We'll want you for evidence against these lads."

"I'll be back," Mocky said again. There was something almost jaunty in his steps.

The sullen eyes were bright suddenly and a wide smile lay on his lips as Mocky strode along. He was thinking: It was going to be the *first time that any bum bought Benny a drink*—

THE END

ANCHOR TO THE STARS

★ By WILLIAM KARNEY ★

THE TECHNICIANS are already hitching their rockets, robot bombs and guided missiles to the stars. Everyone is familiar with the idea of guiding these deadly projectiles with radio and radar beams. The drawback here of course is the fact that the beam can be jammed or altered by suitable means. Thus you can't be sure of sending your missile to where you want it to go.

But they're building into rockets, small astronomical planet-aria which are capable of fastening onto a star and using it as a guiding reference point! Sensitive photo-electric cells act as the eyes of this system and intricate amplifiers and selsyn systems act as muscles. A prearranged course can be set on unit, and the rocket, using the star as its "landmark" will ride surely and accurately toward its destination.

Since their is practically no way of blinding such a projectile it is almost certain to reach its target without any interception. In fact, the idea of a rocket carrying a bomb, controlled from entirely within itself, is most appealing to the scientific and military minds. It is a little self-contained world which cannot be interfered with from outside.

It is a little saddening though, to think that the immortal stars, those poetic objects, are to be the focal points, the anchor points, of war-headed atomic rockets!

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READER'S PAGE

THE TOP OF THE PILE

Sirs:

Thanks a lot for printing my last letter. I've long thought of cracking into your letter columns, but never spent enough time to whip up a good letter. The March, 1950 issue was good, above average...

However, I remember that March 1948 issue ("Zero A.D." and the "Court of Kublai Khan") wistfully, and wish you'd put one out with stories of that calibre. I notice that you've answered the complaints about stf in FA by printing four out of six stories in all real fantasies! There has not been any genuine fantasy on the market for five years, except for your mag. Up till 1943, there was one even better, but that one is now unknown (bitter laughter from those who see through my pun!) Seriously, I think FA is near the top of the pulp pile in stf...

"The World of the Lost" was very good, though not on a par with the two previous novels in FA.

"Detour From Tomorrow" by Phillips... I don't get it! For once, Rog went way over my head, and left a lot to be explained. I think that you are working poor Graham much too hard: Rog P. has appeared 15 times in the last 12 issues of AS and FA (six of each). Add to this six "Club-House" columns in that time and four stories in Ray Palmer's new mag, and Rog is really busy. Let him rest, but use Craig Browning, Peter Worth, and Roger Philip Graham more often. Those boys have something in their stories missing from all of Rog Phillips'.

The new type of short-shorts are a very good idea, for they enable many new authors to hit the market with a first story. But, don't allow all of your pro authors to dump miserable half-plotted short-shorts on you—some of the features printed in recent Ziff-Davis stf mags wouldn't be accepted by a self-respecting fanzine, and some of those poor stories were written by one of your better authors.

I like the new back-cover cut for AMAZING (by Krupa?). It is certainly more attractive than that hairy ape-man and atom cloud used formerly. I still hope you'll alter your type face to make it a bit more crowded on the page, also cut down those excessively large outside margins.

One more thing: I've just found Bloch's little short, which I missed my first time around the mag (I skip around to the more interesting stories first). Very good, though not a new idea. I'm glad that Bloch can write something better than Lefty Feep stories. What's happened to "Presenting the Author"? And is Frank Paul ever going to do a few more pix for you? Jones is doing an excellent job with your covers, but don't let him fall into a rut—the present cover reminded me a lot of the December 1949 AS cover.

I noticed that teen-agers have pretty well taken over your "Reader's Page": Ganley is 16 or thereabouts, Jerry Copher is thirteen, Cal Beck is fourteen (I think), and yours truly is fourteen and a little bit (though I'll be more when this sees print—if it does see print!). That's four out of seven under seventeen in your column. And, finally, do we get some more Toka stories from Pelkie?

Bob Silverberg
760 Montgomery Street
Brooklyn 13, New York

Glad to have you with us again, Bob. As to those delightful "unknown" type of fantasies you mention wistfully, all we can say is, keep watching FA for the best in the realm of the unknown—and we do mean Unknown!.....Ed.

READ 'EM SLOWER, FANS

Sirs:

I see by the "Reader's Page" some people are griping about the magazine being too short and how they finish it in a few hours. Now I don't think that at all. Most of us don't have many spare hours to sit down and read the magazine through in one sitting. The one reason I prefer the shorts and novelettes to long novels is that it takes me three or four days or more to finish one of those stories. Not only do I have to go to work but I have other things I ought to do before I start reading. Enough about that. I want to say how glad I am to see you adding more pictures to your stories. I like lots of pictures with my stories and most of the time the only pictures are on the lead double-spread page. I am glad to see beautiful girls appearing on the covers again. This is one of the most attractive features of your magazine and I was sorry to see you depart from it even for a short time.

I would like to compliment you on the cover story. I found "Diana and the Gold-

(*Continued On Page* 152)

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(*Continued From Page* 150)

en Ring" charming. The other stories were all good but the first one struck me as extra special. I am also glad to hear Toffee will return. I am a great admirer of Thorne Smith's stories, and Toffee seems to be the next best thing to a Thorne Smith story. I would like to say again...increase the length of the magazine with more stories rather than longer ones, so those of us who have only a few minutes at a time to devote to reading will be able to read our stories all at once instead of piecemeal.

Newton W. Hooton
13 Buckingham Street
Cambridge, Mass.

Glad you like the additional illustrations we're using in the lead stories these days. You'll find that a regular policy from now on. And now that you've read the new "Toffee" yarn, what do you think? Isn't Myers a real top-notcher?.....Ed.

YOUNG'S FINE JOB

Sirs:

The March FA lives up to a minor tradition which you seem to have created recently—that of having one excellent story per issue. The story, of course, is Young's "Inoculation", which is the finest stf short FA has run in quite a while. It conveys a good "punch", and is, I think, a new slant on this type of story.

"Detour From Tomorow" and "Mr. "Detour From Tomorrow" and "Mr. pieces. So was "Diana and the Golden Ring", which was better than Tenneshaw usually writes.

I would never have thought that Bob Bloch would write a story like "Girl From Mars". I'm not going to give my opinion of this type of material, as you couldn't print it if I did, but I think even the goo-lovers will agree that such disgusting sex has no place in FA.

I'll confess it—I didn't read "The World of the Lost". Somehow I just can't get myself to read a story of that size (45,000 words) unless I think it will be pretty good.

I think your letter section should be improved; a mag of 162 pages should devote more than 2½ of them to letters.

I'm looking forward to that Del Rey story, and hope that you'll buy more stories from this "type" of author.

Inside illustrations leave a great deal of room for improvement.

Morton D. Paley
1455 Townsend Avenue
New York 52, New York

Come now, Mort, only one excellent story per issue? Or is it that you mean one is always super-excellent?.....Ed.

WEEKLY—MONTHLY—HUH?

Sirs:

I want to join the new club, the "We Read Fantastic Adventures Too Fast Society".

I think it's a wonderful idea to be put into practice to publish FA weekly. I never did understand why it couldn't be published at least once a month.

I enjoyed reading "Diana and the Golden Ring". I usually like the short stories a lot better than the novelettes.

Now the "Toffee" stories are the ones I really like. I got many a laugh out of them.

I remember a story that was published many years ago in your magazine, about a man and dog in an explosion. When they came to, the man barked and the dog talked. Did I enjoy that story!

I don't like all of Rog Phillips stories, some I don't like at all. I did like "Mr. Destiny Follows Through" and "The World of the Lost".

Anyway, I've read your magazine for many years, and hope to read it many more years. What stories I *don't* care for somebody else will like.

I still think it would be a good idea to publish FA *monthly*.

Mrs. J. H. Greene
408 Greenup Avenue
Ashland, Kentucky

Hey, now, an FA fan like you should know that your favorite magazine is on sale each and every month of the year! ...Speaking of Toffee, how do you like the novel in this issue?.....Ed.

IS STF "TRUE" FICTION?

Sirs:

I have been reading science fiction magazines on and off since I was eight. This is the first letter I have ever ventured. It was only recently that I have become interested in the "Reader's Page," and I am at a loss as to what certain initials mean. Does STF mean science true fiction? If it does, how can you call fiction "true"? Or true, "fiction"? Fiction isn't true, and neither is true... Oh, skip it!

This is my honest amateur opinion of the March issue stories.

"Diana and the Golden Ring": simply done, easy to read, and a very nice cover picture—very, very nice.

"Girl From Mars": I liked the twist at the end.

"Detour From Tomorrow": a cute story, but I think there was nothing to it, although Rog wrote it very nicely as usual.

"Inoculation": I enjoyed the story, but was not too sure why the new coordinator did as the machine said. Couldn't he have lied his way out of the room?

"Mr. Destiny Follows Through": nice story, but I thought the gangsters acted

(*Continued On Page* 154)

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The Rosicrucians (AMORC)
San Jose, California

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(*Continued From Page* 152)

too gangsterish.

"The World of the Lost": I have many gripes about this story; gripe no. 1, it was confusing—one minute they're talking about Gur, and the next about Apollo; gripe no. 2, why was all that description necessary about Enthippe—I thought the way it started that the story was about her; gripe no. 3, didn't the artist Terry read the story? The first picture, for instance—the author went through pains to write down what her tunic looked like, and all he draws is a cavegirl bearskin outfit. Also, her hair—it is supposed to be blonde, not brown.

I'd like to compliment Jones again for one of the nicest covers I have ever seen.

Helen R. Yalof
181 Clarkson Avenue
Brooklyn 26, New York

Stf is a contraction of the words science fiction. The "t" stems from another form of the genre known as scientifiction. As to the "true" connotation, you aren't far off anyway. How about the atom bomb—jet-propelled rockets—radar—and even the now famed but still mysterious flying saucers... The way the world is progressing around us you might even say that stf is more truth than fiction.....Ed.

THE WRATH OF THE GODS YET!

Sirs:

Wait a minute there! I thought that you folks of the Z-D offices were planning on expanding *BOTH* AMAZING AND FANTASTIC ADVENTURES as well. I note that AS has zoomed up to 196 pages with the latest ish, but wha' hoppen to FA? Aside of this slight(?) irregularity though, the March FA was lavish with great reading this month with the following three tales taking top rank in order of my personal preference, of course: "The World of the Lost" by Paul Lohrman (a new author?); "Girl From Mars" by Bob Bloch. (darn shame 'twas only 2,500 words); "Detour From Tomorrow" by Rog Phillips (excellent innovation on time-travel yarns and completely avoiding the old stereotyped themes of the past).

Others in order of merit are: "Diana and the Golden Ring" by S. M. Tenneshaw (more like a "grown-ups" fairy tale, but very reminiscent of the old unknown days and contents of same); "Mr. Destiny Follows Through" by Gilbert Grant (don't know why, but it strongly reminded me of Merritt's "Burn Witch Burn"); "Inoculation" by Roger Flint Young (good short—but is this also another pseudo of "Mr. Graham"?).

Your latest system of presenting features and articles is, of course, excellent and only their size and brevity interferes with them in competing with the regular stories for laurels in reading enjoyment. As one of my best correspondents and Associate Director of our club once put it: "In the old days, they would have used the very same plots and themes used in the 'Features' as material for stories and novels of 10,000 or 25,000 words, and even more."

Re the "Reader's Page", I was gratified to see it expanded slightly in the March FA, but sad to say, only ever so small was its size. I presume though that as the older and newer readers become accustomed to seeing it around again, it will assume the scope and breadth of your competitors (we hope!)—and I can't help but acquiesce 100% with Paul Ganley that 'twould be advisable to get FA back to its size and level of 7 to 9 years ago, and leave us not have the old adage of *paper shortage* ringing in our ears anymore, since I'm definitely in a very unpatriotic mood if pulp and print have anything to do with our government, especially after making my analysis of what I owe to Uncle Sammy-well this March anent and re taxes et al. Nay, nay, there's definite room for expansion in FA, and we must see it grow, do you hear me? FA *MUST* grow, or I shall call down the spirit of Cuthbertius, God of sf fantasy mags dead and past to haunt you for not complying with the wishes of his ravenous hordes who demand bigger, fatter, heavier and larger sf mags!!!

Calvin Thos. Beck
President
Science-Fantasy Society
P.O. Box 877
Grand Central Station
New York 17, N.Y.

Gosh, Cal, you wouldn't do a mean thing like that, would you? The last time we were forced to cut the size of FA, old Cuthbertius threatened to isolate us on Pluto with bread and water rations for eternity. Now we don't mind bread so much, but that Pluto water.....Ed.

TWO HOUR DEADLINE

Sirs:

I just got your magazine for this month and was reading thru the letter section. I always do that first. I usually read a magazine in installments, but saw that 2 PM to 4 PM business. To see if it were actually so, I tried it. Sure enough!

To go through this issue: "Diana and the Golden Ring" is a swell story. Y'know, the market is starved for good fantasy, and this only partly fills the bill. Let's have some more stories like "Lair of the Grimalkin", and others. "The World of the Lost" wasn't too bad, either. It would have been better however, if it had remained a "primitive", instead of having gone off with the gods.

This letter ends off with a sour note. I didn't like Bob Bloch's story. It's amazing, because he is one of my favorite au-

(*Continued On Page* 156)

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By FRITZ LEIBER

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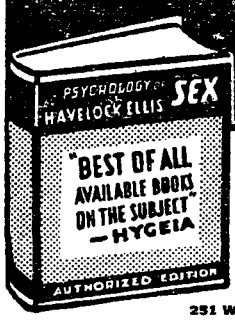

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(*Continued From Page* 154)

thors. Perhaps you could get him to write some funny stories.

OK, Ed, pleasant dreams.

Jim Goldfrank
1116 Fulton Street
Woodmere, New York

Gads, Jimmy, at that rate we'll have to put FA out daily to keep up with you! Say, how about that!.....Ed.

NEW FAN MAGAZINE

Sirs:

Yes, here I am once more. This is becoming a habit—a very nice one, too. I rather enjoy these little epistles to fantasy magazines; but unfortunately I can't write as many as I used to. I am too busy. About three months ago, when I saw in a printed letter that some fan complained he was too busy even to write to magazines' letter columns, I took it with the proverbial grain of salt. After all, said I, who could be that busy? I have found out.

"Diana and the Golden Ring" was about the finest story in the March issue, with Roger Flint Young's "Inoculation" a close second. Those two stories were worthy of the old FANTASTIC ADVENTURES. "Detour From Tomorrow" (I don't quite follow the reason for such a title) was readable, although nothing exceptional, and while it was a rehash of an old theme, and I don't care for that particular type of weird story, "Girl From Mars" was of a high enough caliber to warrant its appearance in FA. The others, well, they're better off if left unmentioned.

Bob Gibson Jones' cover was about the best by him I've seen since I started reading science-fantasy (that is, since I began to read AS & FA). I think you've made some terrible mistakes giving him other types of covers to paint. He should have done the one for "Man From Yesterday"—except that the artist you gave it to did a superb job. But I brought mention of that in merely to illustrate what I mean by the type of cover Jones should do. Maybe I'm all wet; maybe he had a flash of genius. By the way, he's getting as frequent on your covers as Bergey on SS & TWS.

Incidentally, why didn't FA increase in number of pages along with AS? Would some of your readers like to get a 20% discount on many valuable sf books, such as KID FROM MARS, BEST SF STORIES, 49, WHAT MAD UNIVERSE, and others? Such bargains are a regular service of the International Science Fiction Correspondence Club, the club which was first advertised through a Ziff-Davis publication (I'm not sure whether 'twas AS or FA, I think the latter).

I'd also like to mention, in passing, a new fanzine. Mine. Probably I've mentioned it in previous letters; I don't know, but if

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so, I'm repeating myself.

I'd like to see whether some of your passi-fan readers might be interested; though hectographed, unfortunately, I'm trying to publish the best of fan fiction. I'm killing two birds with one stone, so to speak. I.e., I am (1) providing entertainment for my subscribers, and (2) aiding my authors to become better writers. I believe that the fan (amateur, to you non-actifans) authors of today, are the professional authors of tomorrow. I believe they can be helped if their material is set forth before a regular reading public, and that if the public criticizes, as it will (it can't help it), they're bound to improve. But I can take only 50 subs at present. Thus: persons interested in my venture send a six-issue subscription (50c) to me for "Fan-Fare" or at least 10c for a sample copy. You won't be helping me, but the writers that I publish!

W. Paul Ganley
119 Ward Road
N. Tonawanda, New York

We think that fan magazine projects such as yours, Paul, are a worthy endeavor, and should have the support of loyal stf followers. And it is true that a great many professional science-fantasy writers emerge from the ranks of the "little" magazines. So we say, more power to you!.....Ed.

NOW, LISTEN, READERS...

Sirs:

For the March '50 cover of FANTASTIC, Jones came near causing a renaissance in cover paintings for our favorite magazines. Look at that costume on Diana again, will you gentlemen? Does it not reveal some of what it hides? If Jones had only done with the top part of that costume what he did with the skirt section, perhaps art editors would have called for an end of Big Blond Bare-Busted Babes on the covers of stf mags. If we were art critics we would have undoubtedly found that the lines slanted the wrong way or some such thing. However, since we are but a mere fan who cares more what is inside the zine and who has always believed that "beauty is only skin deep", I will say only that this bit of work is a credit to Jones whose "scantily-clad" females in the past have often been painted in a manner which for a while led me to believe that Jones had been bought from the Pepsi-Cola advertising people.

To detail my feelings about each story would not only take up too much of your time but would also be useless and futile in the face of the many more talented opinions appearing in the "Reader's Page" columns. Suffice to say that I have yet to read a story by Roger Phillips Graham which I did not like at least a little, and that I did read every one of the stories, which really means something. Unlike other self-torturing fans, I am not in the

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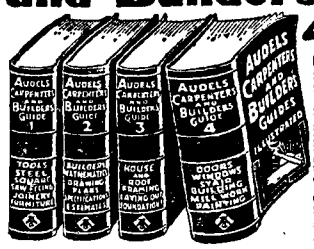

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habit of forcing myself to read anything that I dislike.

"The World of the Lost" by Paul Lohrman (Lower Man, a contraction thereof meaning two things, namely, one who lives in the caves below, and, one of a grade inferior in general development-possibly a dero). I'll bet it was welcomed with wide-open and out-stretched, adoring, worshipful arms by the lunatic fringe of fandom. I read it all right, but with misgivings when I realized the incalculable damage it wrought, or must have, to the cortex of these strange and often esoteric peoples of the fringe, who are due one day for a sad and possibly rude awakening. That day, of course, will be the day when Roscoe (bless his broad and useful tail), chooses to light the Birch Bark Torch and disseminate the Light of Revelation of Ancient Knowledge.

"Reader's Page" comments follow: C. T. Beck, director and THE member of SFCTC implies that Slan has "conflicting detail". I'd like to see him qualify that statement.

As for Betty Jane Buzzo and Hubmann and any others who read FA too fast, the obvious solution is the purchase of AMAZING STORIES. That should give them approximately four hours of reading, which is about enough reading for one day. There are other zines (believe it or not) for other days.

Betty Jane wrote a good letter. Silverberg did, too. I find it extremely hard to believe that some of these people are for real. Ganley, Oresky and Copher, for example. McNaughton did clear something up, I suppose, for those who are often puzzled by the obvious.

Suggest that Ganley check back and this time look far enough above and below his letters printed to pass up the editorial comment. He will be surprised to see from time to time many different letters with as many different names which common sense tells me are such a small representative fraction of the numbers of readers of FA that they couldn't possibly approach representing a true cross-section.

Oresky can go jump off a key with a whole load of textbooks and slanted stories if he doesn't want to furnish his hometown, Jacksonville, Florida, or whatever it happens to be.

It is well that Jerry Copher, lets us know that he is only thirteen years old. Then such statements as, "I'm a new reader of AS and FA and as such I find the 'Reader's Page' one of the most popular features of your magazine", can be excused or overlooked. But anyone who starts off a letter with, "This letter...probably won't get published because I am only thirteen..." can go. Should, in fact.

Thank you for your time.

J. Blyler Esq.
R.D. No. 1
Ashville, Pa.

Gentlemen, the floor is now yours.....Ed.

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THE FANSTON DRIVE

★ By CAL WEBB ★

WE LOOK up at the stars and they mock us. Yes, we stare out of the ports of a Martian freighter or a Jovian destroyer and we see the diamond-studded curtain of eternal night that hangs across the Solar System. And we watch the stars swing in their courses. That's all we can do, too—watch.

Yes, we have the Fanston Drive, the modification of the atomic turbines which will twist and warp space until the very sub-atoms of which it is composed writhe and twist and distort enough to permit the passage of material bodies at speeds approaching light. We even use the Fanston Drive throughout the Solar System. But we don't go to the stars with it...

Actually there's nothing stopping us. We can, if we want to, take a Fanston Driven ship and hurl it toward Wolf or for that matter toward one of the farther suns. But we don't.

Five hundred years ago men did it, though. Why don't they do it now?

The reason and the answer lie exposed to the casual eye—and they don't sound so terrible at first. The Einsteinian equations say that as the speed of a material object closes with that of the velocity of light, its mass approaches the infinite. And as the mass approaches the infinite, *time approaches zero.*

There is the answer!

For the men who have undertaken the voyages in the past, the explanation is clear. While years and centuries roll by back on Terra, their home, their root, only seconds and minutes pass aboard the interstellar ships. Time and place become out of phase and there is no joining them.

The first men who made the journeys came back to Earth a hundred years later, even though mere weeks had passed aboard their interstellar ship! What had happened—to them, it seemed—was that they never had a home. Moving out of time is just as real as moving out of space. You leave the Earth and come back to it, but you don't come back to the same times, the same people, the same things. All that remains is a vastly changed Terra.

Yes, men don't journey to the stars anymore. The gains aren't worth the effort or the time-removed horror of being cast out of living in one's age.

The inexorable laws of physics brook no interference. There is no way to align time and space. Each is a part and parcel of something greater—space-time, nor can all the efforts of men control them separately. Give up time and you give up space.

No, we won't go to the stars anymore...

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SOLAR PIRATES

★ By LEE OWENS ★

STATION three-eighty-four might be cramped but it had almost everything a patrolman might want—at least for a while. I was on duty, thumbing through a sheaf of microfilm, idly amusing myself, but fully clad in space-armor as regulations required. Larry and Frank were sacking it comfortably somewhere in the station. Every now and then I glanced toward the Videolarm, but nothing had happened for weeks.

The last time we got a call was more than two weeks ago when Central on Mars Seven flashed a two-nine—a couple of kids had taken a joy-ride on a rocket speedster. Frank picked 'em both up without any complications or trouble.

Abruptly I was jolted out of my musing. I flipped away my cigarette and turned toward the Videolarm.

Leslie, the dispatcher at Central, poked his ugly face onto the screen and his face rumbled from the speaker cones:

"Three-eighty-four! Attention! Clamp radar tracers on a four man pirate. Go and get 'em boys—and shoot to kill! They've murdered two civilians here on Mars Seven. Move!"

"O.K." I barked back at the screen, "Three-eighty-four acknowledging and acting!" I turned toward the tape-recorder. Swiftly I spoke into it: "Taking the flitter after pirates—track me, boys!"

A minute later I was seated in the bucket of the fast little flitter and moving at high acceleration away from the station. My radar tracers were on and my Rodenhammer anti-blast screens were up.

It took twenty seconds for my instruments to pick up the pirate. Recognition clicked through. It was a four-twenty rocket, fast and tough, but no match for a Solar patrol craft like my flitter. I've often wondered how pirates can be so damned foolish to think they can punch it out with the Patrol which is usually so much better armed and equipped, but they do.

They gave me a run, all right.

Fast as the flitter was, the pirate had some jets too, and the pilot knew how to use them. But he stood about as much chance of shaking me as a criminal does a blood-hound. The little flitter—on full robotic—followed unerringly.

At three thousand kilometers they began throwing fire, first a Wellton torpedo, a lethal cylinder laden with triple-Q, and powered by rockets, but my screens washed it out at a thousand K's.

My instruments showed power absorption. The pirates were trying a heat beam.

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I could have laughed at the futility of it.

"O.K. boys," I spoke quietly into the 'mitter, "the jig's up. Let's call it quits. Come in quietly with me and I won't hurt you."

No answer.

"Last chance," I barked now, good and mad, "I'm pushing a pulse in half-a-minute if I'm not answered."

No answer.

Here goes. I touched the firing stud. An intensely lethal spear of radiation lashed from the forward tube-mount. It didn't move fast. I could follow it with my eyes clearly through the heavy filtered port.

The ravening lanco, like some grotesque tongue reached out and touched the tail of the pirate speedster.

A corsucant flash of incandescent flame, a vaporizing puff of sublimed metal—and half a pirate spacer lay helpless in space!

I towed them in—they even tried hand-guns on me on the way back—but of course the screens kept them away. And the patrol took them away.

Sometimes I wonder about how boring a patrolman's lot can get. Right now I'm reading again. Frank is due to relieve me, but the Videolarm is quiet. Oh well, maybe things will get more interesting later...

ATOMIC CLOCK

★ By W. R. CHASE ★

AN ALMOST standard way of estimating the life of the earth or of rocks which make it up, is to measure the amount of residual radioactivity or the amount of lead in it. Knowing how long it takes radium or uranium to go to lead we can get a pretty good picture of the age of the mineral matter.

A couple of profs at the University of Chicago have come up with a new twist. In the course of their researches on cosmic rays they discovered that the radiation changed ordinary everyday carbon which is in all plant and animal life, into a radioactive form of carbon called "carbon 14".

The half-life of carbon 14 is about six thousand years. This means that a given quantity of carbon reduces itself by half in six thousand years. Consequently by measuring the amount of carbon 14 present in a specimen, you can judge the age of the specimen.

As a check, the scientists applied the test to samples of wood from Egyptian tombs whose age was accurately known. They checked perfectly. Hence it was possible to construct a calibration chart or scale.

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We're not trying to blow our own horn. But we do want to call attention to a revolution which is taking place in science, which will presently affect us all, and which in the long run may be more important than the discovery and exploitation of atomic energy. And we talked about it in *Amazing* for a long, long time.

We are referring to "thinking machines"—"mechanical brains".

No single discovery is as great as this new developement.

We reported a year ago or so on "cybernetics", the new science which is concerned with controls and communications in machines, and which promises so many aids to human brain-work.

This is closely allied with the study of calculating and storing machines. "Binac", "Eniac", and a host of others of these new calculating machines have been built during and since the Second World War. They are an outgrowth of atomic gun-fire control and guided missile work.

These machines are complexes of gears and wheels and levers, relays, vacuum tubes and wires. You feed numbers or words into the machines and they do operations upon them or with them. They are miracles of human inventiveness.

At present these psuedo-thinking machines are limited, but with each day they grow more complex and more powerful and problems which humans are incapable of solving have been licked by them.

Furthermore, knowledge learned from work with calculating machines is reflected in our increased understanding of how the human brain works. Conversely the more we learn about minds, the better we make the machines.

One day, we predict, machines are going to be built which will do anything a human can do, but do it faster, better, more efficiently, more thoroughly and more economically. There are exceptions of course.

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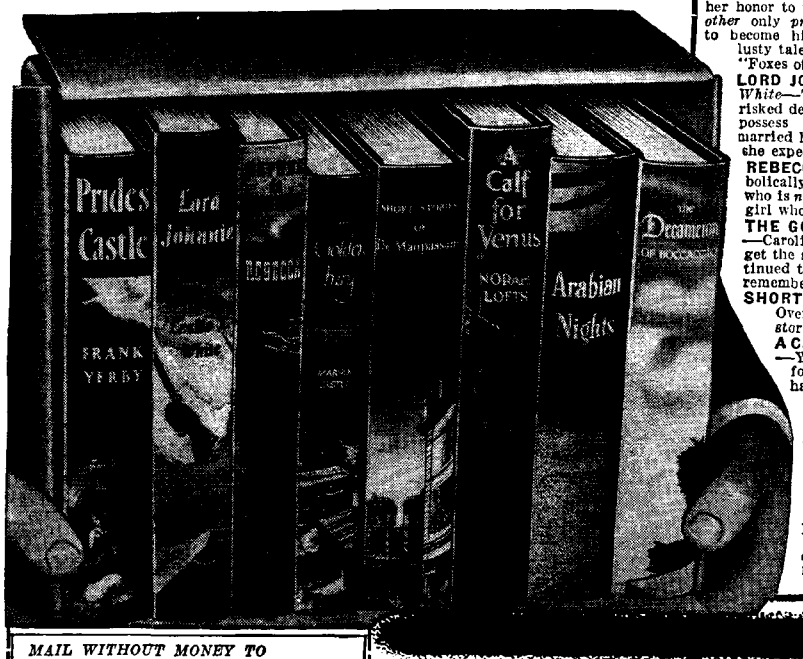

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